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University of California
Source of Community Leaders Series

Mary LeCron Foster

FINDING THE THEMES: FAMILY, ANTHROPOLOGY, LANGUAGE ORIGINS, PEACE AND CONFLICT

With Introductions by
Robert A. Rubinstein
and
Maxine Sheets-Johnstone

Interviews Conducted by
Suzanne Riess
in 2000

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Mary LeCron Foster, 2001.

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Cataloging information

Mary LeCron Foster (b. 1914)

Anthropologist

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LeCron and Cowles family history in Iowa, friends, schools, Des Moines neighborhoods; life themes, rituals, illness; studying anthropology at Northwestern University, Melville Herskovits; marriage to George Foster and study in Vienna, 1938; fieldwork in Mexico: Sierra Popoluca, 1941, long-term work in Tzintzuntzan; mounting anthropology museum exhibitions; Ph.D. in linguistics, UC Berkeley; teaching linguistics at Cal State Hayward; organizing 1977 Wenner-Gren symposium, "Fundamentals of Symbolism"; children Melissa and Jeremy, and family life in Mexico, Washington, and Berkeley, vacations, social groups; integrating anthropology and peace, PACT, International Peace Academy, Ploughshares; Language Origins Society and current work on global language reconstruction. Appendices include "Cognitive Requisites for Language" and "Countering Offense: Institutionalized Alternatives to Military Action" by Foster; and an interview by Jan Thomas with Foster on the methodology and findings of language origins research.

Introductions by Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, Department of Philosophy, University of Oregon; and Robert A. Rubinstein, Professor of Anthropology and of International Relations, Syracuse University.

Interviewed 2000 by Suzanne Riess, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

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University of California, Class of 1931 Endowment Fund

TABLE OF CONTENTS--Mary LeCron Foster

PREFACE	i
INTRODUCTION by Maxine Sheets-Johnstone	iv
INTRODUCTION by Robert A. Rubinstein	vii
INTERVIEW HISTORY by Suzanne Riess	xii
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION	xv
I FAMILY	1
Grandparents	1
Parents, Extended Family	8
Newspaper Business	12
Mother, A Writer	13
Religion	17
Household Help	19
Growing Up, Summer Trips, Camping	22
Becoming "Mickie"	28
School Days	30
Growing Up, With Books	33
II DES MOINES	36
Neighborhood Orientation	36
Friends, Joey, and Halloween	37
Some Observed Differences	42
More on Mother's Writing	45
Word Games, Puzzles, Language	47
World War I, A Background Memory	49
More on the Family and Publishing	52
Self-Confidence	54
Organizations, Clubs	55
A Year of Rituals and Celebrations	56
III FINDING THE THEMES	61
Illness, Death, and Taboo Subjects	62
Babies	73
Marriage, and Divorce	77
Shyness and Control, and Bunny	81
Hospitals	84
IV DES MOINES AND BEYOND	86
Family Life	86
Household Management Models	88
Recollections of Social Strata, and Houses	90
Views of a Writing Life	94

	Living in France, Travels	98
	Parents in Washington, The New Deal, Wallace	104
V	LAUNCHED	107
	Anthropology and Melville Herskovits	107
	Longer Range Plans	111
	Courtship	113
	Marriage	116
	Vienna, 1938, and Jewish Friend	118
	Mother, and Wife	120
VI	DISCOVERING LINGUISTICS	123
	Fieldwork with George, 1941	123
	Finding an Informant, Documenting a Language	125
	Back to Berkeley, A New Baby, Syracuse, and UCLA	129
	Texts, Grammar, Phonology, in Partnership	130
	Working on the Sierra Popoluca Grammar	133
	Traveling with the Covarrubias	136
VII	GRADUATE WORK IN LINGUISTICS	140
	The Linguistics Department at Berkeley	140
	Chomsky's Effect on Linguistics Studies	143
	Thoughts on the Acquisition of Language	145
	Lévi-Straus, Hjelmslev	146
	More on Berkeley and the Study of Linguistics	149
	Following Opportunities to Work in Linguistics	152
	More on the Linguistics Department	154
	A Comparative Science, of Trivia	157
VIII	REFLECTIONS ON ANTHROPOLOGY, AND PEACE AND CONFLICT	160
	Structuralism, Relativism, and Self-Awareness	160
	AAAS Committee on Science, Arms Control, and National Security	166
	The International Peace Academy, and PACT	167
	International Travels and Local Languages	169
	Work in Language Prehistory, Importance of Analogy	171
	Anthropology Museum, Exhibitions and Labels	176
	More on the Pursuit of Linguistics	179
	Returning to the Discussion of Conflict and Non Conflict	184
	More on the International Peace Academy, and PACT	185
	Integrating Anthropology and Peace and War: Robert Rubinstein and the 1983 IUAES Commission	190
IX	BOOKS, FRIENDS, FAMILIES	195
	Reading, Gardens, Art	195
	Social Groups, Society of Women Geographers	200
	Family Vacations in Calaveras County	203
	Building the San Luis Road House	206
	Melissa and Jeremy	209
X	TEACHING, SYMPOSIA, CURRENT WORK	217
	Teaching at Cal State Hayward, 1970, and Kent Cambodia Crisis	217
	Symposium on Symbolism at Burg Wartenstein	221

A Trip to Obernberg	222
Organizing the Symposium	224
Language Origins Society	226
Global Language Reconstruction	227
Structuralism, an Epiphany, and a Model	231
Ploughshares, Reason for Optimism	233
Finale	236
TAPE GUIDE	238
APPENDICES	240
A Mary LeCron Foster Curriculum Vitae	241
B Robert Rubinstein's Remarks at Fosters' March 5, 2001, Oral History Presentation	248
C "Countering Offense: Institutionalized Alternatives to Military Action," text of a talk by Mary LeCron Foster	253
D Introduction, by Mary LeCron Foster, to <i>The Life of Symbols</i> , edited by Mary LeCron Foster and Lucy Jayne Botscharow, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1990.	279
E "Language Origins Research: A Brief Review of Methodology and Findings," Mary LeCron Foster, interviewed by Jan Thomas, January 5, 2001	287
E "Cognitive Requisites for Language," a talk delivered to the Language Origins Society, 1991	312
F April 8, 2000, notes from Foster to Riess	318
G "Fostering New Ways to Prevent Conflict, Mickie Foster and the Cowles Fund," from the newsletter of The Ploughshares Fund, Summer 2000	pocket, inside back cover
UNIVERSITY HISTORY SERIES LIST	320
INDEX	333

PREFACE

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of our graduation from the University of California at Berkeley, the Class of 1931 made the decision to present its alma mater with an endowment for an oral history series to be titled "The University of California, Source of Community Leaders." The Class of 1931 Oral History Endowment provides a permanent source of funding for an ongoing series of interviews by the Regional Oral History Office of The Bancroft Library.

The commitment of the endowment is to carry out interviews with persons related to the University who have made outstanding contributions to the community, by which is meant the state or the nation, or to a particular field of endeavor. The memoirists, selected by a committee set up by the class, are to come from Cal alumni, faculty, and administrators. The men and women chosen will comprise an historic honor list in the rolls of the University.

To have the ability to make a major educational endowment is a privilege enjoyed by only a few individuals. Where a group joins together in a spirit of gratitude and admiration for their alma mater, dedicating their gift to one cause, they can affect the history of that institution greatly.

The oral histories illustrate the strength and skills the University of California has given to its sons and daughters, and the diversity of ways that they have passed those gifts on to the wider community. We envision a lengthening list of University-inspired community leaders whose accounts, preserved in this University of California, Source of Community Leaders Series, will serve to guide students and scholars in the decades to come.

Lois L. Swabel
President, Class of 1931

William H. Holabird
President, retired, Class of 1931

Harold Kay, M.D.,
Chairman, Class of 1931 Gift Committee

September 1993
Walnut Creek, California

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SOURCE OF COMMUNITY LEADERS SERIES

April 2001

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Includes interviews with thirty-four persons who knew him well:
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David Pierpont Gardner, Marion Sproul Goodin, Vernon L. Goodin,
Louis H. Heilbron, Robert S. Johnson, Clark Kerr, Adrian A. Kragen,
Mary Blumer Lawrence, Stanley E. McCaffrey, Dean McHenry, Donald H.
McLaughlin, Kendric Morrish, Marian Morrish, William Penn Mott, Jr.,
Herman Phleger, John B. deC.M. Saunders, Carl W. Sharsmith, John A.
Sproul, Robert Gordon Sproul, Jr., Wallace Sterling, Wakefield
Taylor, Robert M. Underhill, Eleanor L. Van Horn, Garff B. Wilson,
and Pete Yzaguirre.

Bennett, Mary Woods, class of '31, A Career in Higher Education: Mills
College 1935-1974, 1987.

Bridges, Robert, class of '30, Sixty Years of Legal Advice to
International Construction Firms; Thelen, Marrin, Johnson and
Bridges, 1933-1997, 1998.

Browne, Alan K., class of '31, "Mr. Municipal Bond": Bond Investment
Management, Bank of America, 1929-1971, 1990.

Coliver, Edith, class of '43, foreign aid specialist (in process).

Cubie, Grete W. (Frugé), class of '35, A Career in Public Libraries and
at UC Berkeley's School of Librarianship, 1937-1975, 2000.

Dettner, Anne DeGruchy Low-Beer, class of '26, A Woman's Place in Science
and Public Affairs: 1932-1973, 1996.

Devlin, Marion, class of '31, Women's News Editor: Vallejo Times-Herald,
1931-1978, 1991.

Foster, George M., class of '35, Ph.D. '41, An Anthropologist's Life in
the Twentieth Century: Theory and Practice at UC Berkeley, the
Smithsonian, in Mexico, and with the World Health Organization,
2000.

Foster, Mary LeCron, Ph.D. '65, Finding the Themes: Family, Anthropology,
Language Origins, Peace and Conflict, 2001.

Hassard, H. Howard, class of '31, The California Medical Association,
Medical Insurance, and the Law, 1935-1992, 1993.

- Hedgpeth, Joel W., class of '33, Marine Biologist and Environmentalist: Pycnogonids, Progress, and Preserving Bays, Salmon, and Other Living Things, 1996.
- Heilbron, Louis H., class of '28, Most of a Century: Law and Public Service, 1930s to 1990s, 1995.
- Hoadley, Walter, B.A. '38, M.A. '40, Ph.D. '46, Business Economist, Federal Reserve System Director, and University of California Regent, 1938-2000, 2000.
- Kay, Harold, M.D., class of '31, A Berkeley Boy's Service to the Medical Community of Alameda County, 1935-1994, 1994.
- Kittredge, Janice, class of '47, Volunteer and Employment Careers: University of California, Berkeley; Save San Francisco Bay Association, 1964-1998, 2000.
- Koshland, Daniel E., Jr., class of '41, professor of microbiology (in process).
- Kragen, Adrian A., class of '31, A Law Professor's Career: Teaching, Private Practice, and Legislative Representative, 1934 to 1989, 1991.
- Lin, T. Y., M.S. '33, professor of structural engineering (in process).
- Peterson, Rudolph A., class of '25, A Career in International Banking with the Bank of America, 1936-1970, and the United Nations Development Program, 1971-1975, 1994.
- Reynolds, Flora Elizabeth, M.A. '35, "A Dukedom Large Enough": Forty Years in Northern California's Public and Academic Libraries, 1936-1976, 2000.
- Schwabacher, James H., Jr., class of '41, music teacher and patron of arts (in process).
- Stripp, Fred S., Jr., class of '32, University Debate Coach, Berkeley Civic Leader, and Pastor, 1990.
- Torre, Gary, class of '41, Labor and Tax Attorney, 1949-1982; Sierra Club Foundation Trustee, 1968-1981, 1994-1998, 1999.
- Trefethen, Eugene E., class of '30, Kaiser Industries, Trefethen Vineyards, the University of California, and Mills College, 1926-1994, 1997.

INTRODUCTION by Maxine Sheets-Johnstone

Mary LeCron Foster is a dear friend, cherished colleague, and meticulous and indefatigable scholar. I met her quite accidentally in the course of doing research for *The Roots of Thinking*. I was working on a chapter titled "On the Origin of Language" and found her seminal article "The Symbolic Structure of Primordial Language" in Washburn and McCown's book *Human Evolution: Biosocial Perspectives*. The power of the article, its linguistic thesis, its extensive supporting documentation, and its fine analyses were stunning. It was not just a matter of finding a piece of research coincident theoretically with the thrust of my own work; it was a matter of finding research that opened strikingly original and new dimensions of thought. I was in Philadelphia at the time so my accidental meeting with Mary was in print and quite one-sided. But I immediately wrote to her at Berkeley and thereby began a most wonderful friendship and association. In the near future we hope to collaborate on an essay bringing together semantic aspects of our individual work.

What makes Mary's work so compelling begins with her thesis: the symbolic structure of primordial (verbal) language has its origin in root or elementary articulatory gestures, gestures such as closing the lips to make the sound *m*. These root gestures--what Mary terms "phememes," and what may also be termed archetypal kinetic forms--are pan-human possibilities. Her investigations, which extend over an impressive range and diversity of human languages, attest to the fact that these root articulatory forms have fundamental meanings. All reconstructed root forms of the sound *m*, for example, refer to bilateral relationships that are spatio-kinetically analogous to the act of bringing the lips together to make the sound: "the fingers or hands in taking or grasping," for instance, or "two opposed surfaces in tapering, pressing together, holding together, crushing, or resting against" ("The Structure of Primordial Language," p. 110). In primordial verbal language, the sound *m* thus referred to a particular motional-relational complex. It might have referred to resting against nest materials as in sleeping or against the earth as in standing, or to pressing together as in copulating, or to crushing as in chewing food or to pounding one thing with another. In effect, what the linguistic reconstruction of the symbolic structure of primordial verbal language shows is that articulatory gestures were of primary semantic significance, which is to say that the felt, moving body, the tactile-kinesthetic body, was the focal point of symbolization.

Mary's research findings, which began with her discovery of root forms and her reconstruction of primordial language on the basis of these root forms, are presently being compiled in *Unraveling Babel*, a work-in-progress. I would like to include her own *Precis* of this work

here in this Introduction because it is emblematic of her careful and thorough analyses and at the same time of the scope and trenchancy of her thesis.

Unraveling Babel
(Book Precis)

Global cross-family language comparison with reconstructive reliance on the regularity of language-specific sound changes, reveals a universally shared, monogenetic, primordial stock of thousands of one- to six-consonant roots derived from combinations of phonological gestures (phememes) that originally served as facsimiles of spatial-relational configurations. While phememe losses and fusions modified meanings and reorganized phonological inventories over the intervening millennia, all historic phonemes can be shown to derive from eleven semantically simulative, consonantal phememes: four voiceless oral stops-- *p (outward), *t (juxtaposed), *c (oblique), *k (vertical); two laryngeal consonants-- *ʔ (interrupted), and *h (prolonged); five resonant continuants, including two semivowels-- *m (bracketed), *n (interposed), *l (lax), *w (curvate), *y (lineal), plus a single, semantically neutral, epenthetic, central vowel, *a. Diverse methods of realizing consonantal combinations created historical Babel that the present study acts to unravel.

Evolutionary understanding of linguistic prehistory requires no postulation of major genetic mutations, only a gradual conversion of signaled categorizations of happenings, as warning of presence of a predator becomes reference to predator as member of a category, or as vocal signaling of food-sighting becomes symbolic reference to the category of food sighted. Analysis of the recovered monogenetic lexicon illuminates evolutionary cognitive development, with progressive expansion of semantic differentiations, discovery of successive isoglosses marking phonological changes, and of semantic reorganizations on a deep, Whorfian level. That the roots of language are found to be categorically abstract rather than event-specific demonstrates that language did not begin as naming, as is commonly supposed, but instead converted early, abstractly categorical signaling to abstract relational reference: first perhaps as a mimetic transfer from whole- to part-body analogues, much as abstract whole-body analogues are displayed as spatial-visual representations in the bee-dance: for bees a complex, representational signal rather than a symbol, but suggesting an evolutionary means of

hominoid, analogical spatial-relational progression from signal to symbol.

An exceptional and far-reaching insight of Mary's work is evident in the above *Precis*. Her analyses of phememes and the bodily roots of language in articulatory gestures are the basis for her breakthrough finding that primordial language was motional-relational in nature rather than nominative. In addition to calling received wisdom into question, this insight has substantive epistemological and metaphysical implications; it says something about the animate nature of life, the fundamentally animate way in which individuals make their way in the world and make sense of the world.

I mentioned in the beginning that Mary is an indefatigable scholar. *Unraveling Babel* has been long in process not only because of Mary's many extensive travels around the world throughout her adult life and including her recent years but because of her research attitude: she is continually open to discovery. Linguistic matters of fact lead the way; theory follows from evidence. The opening paragraph of her *Precis* is testimony to her way of working. She is a scholar's scholar in this respect and an inspiration.

Maxine Sheets-Johnstone
Department of Philosophy, University
of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon
January 24, 2001

INTRODUCTION by Robert A. Rubinstein

War has been a focus of anthropological study since the discipline's earliest years. Yet legitimacy had long eluded peace studies in anthropology. Anthropologists were often dismissed as pursuing work based solely on individual political agendas when their research sought to elucidate how people maintain peaceful societies, or conduct their conflicts in a constructive manner, or avoided violent confrontations, for example. Prior to the 1980s only a handful of ethnographic studies were carried out in "peace studies" proper, and even fewer ethnological syntheses were attempted.

Peace studies is now viewed as a legitimate area of anthropology largely because of Mary LeCron Foster's scholarship and organizational efforts. In this brief introduction to her oral history, I want to highlight from my personal experience of twenty years of working with Mickie (as she is known to her friends) the ways in which she helped us achieve this disciplinary shift.

Mickie was in peace-oriented activities well before I met her. As an anthropologist and as an activist, Mickie had acted on her personal concerns about the possibilities of nuclear holocaust. She had become convinced that individual anthropologists, and anthropology as a profession, could play key roles in preventing and de-escalating violent conflicts and in preventing nuclear annihilation.

I met Mickie Foster in Amsterdam in 1981, where we had both traveled to attend the Intercongress of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences. She and George were there as representatives of the American Anthropological Association. Mickie was participating in a symposium on "The Future of Structuralism," at which I was also giving a paper. I had never been to the IUAES meetings before, and carried a letter of introduction to Mickie and George from Sol Tax, with whom I had been working.

At the end of the meeting, Mickie and I met for coffee. This turned into a three-hour-long conversation. We covered a lot of ground in this conversation. But Mickie always brought us back to what seemed her central concern: Anthropologists ought to be making a more serious contribution to discussions in the international peace and security community. If they brought their knowledge to bear on those discussions the resulting policies would be vastly different, and wiser than then current.

Mickie reminded me that many anthropologists were personally involved in the anti-war movement and anti-nuclear weapons movements.

But this personal involvement rarely translated into professional engagement. When it did, the results seldom addressed our contemporary dilemmas. In 1967, at the height of the Vietnam War, a major symposium was held at the American Anthropological Association. Speaking of that symposium, Margaret Mead said that it was a "systematic anthropological contribution to the most pressing problem of our generation--the prevention of war." (See *War: The Anthropology of Armed Conflict and Aggression*, edited by M. Fried, M. Harris and R. Murphy. New York: American Museum of Natural History Press, 1968). All of the main papers in that session were devoted to analyzing war rather than peace, save two, those by Mead and Sol Tax. Tax was excoriated by the discussant of his paper as not having done anthropology. Sadly, the symposium and its proceedings reflected the pattern that characterized the discipline during the next decade-and-a-half: Anthropologists would research and write on war--especially "primitive" war--but those who sought to contribute to the prevention of war were marginalized and worked outside of the discipline.

Mickie recognized this pattern. Yet, we agreed, despite there being few full-fledged peace studies ethnographies, anthropologists had amassed a tremendous amount of material that if collected and properly presented could inform policy making in the areas of peace and conflict resolution. We parted agreeing to co-organize a symposium for the next World Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, to be held in Vancouver, British Columbia in 1983. I returned to Chicago, and Mickie to Berkeley.

The ensuing two years found us exchanging letters and several phone calls nearly every week, except when one of us was traveling. It was during this time that I came to know the qualities that Mickie drew on in this enterprise: networking, energy, resourcefulness, and vision.

When we departed Amsterdam, I expected that we might find ten or so other anthropologists who might join us in the exercise of applying anthropological knowledge to peace studies. Within a week Mickie had convinced me that we ought to contact every practicing anthropologist whose work might bear on our topic and invite them to participate in the Vancouver symposium. We immediately began an extensive literature review. In addition, Mickie, who was widely acquainted in anthropology, began networking. With an energy that I had not fathomed, she wrote literally hundreds of letters to anthropologists around the world telling them of our project and inviting them to participate and nominate others as well.

It wasn't long before answers started rolling in--some negative but many positive. It soon became clear that there was considerable enthusiasm for this work, and Mickie had the vision to recognize that for the symposium to be worthwhile we would need to have meaningful representation from non-Western communities and from the Soviet Union

and Eastern Europe. Identifying and contacting anthropologists in these areas called for resourcefulness, and Mickie personally called, sent telegrams, sent messages via personal friends, and generally worked through her network to communicate with these colleagues. Mickie also suggested that we include in our sessions some non-anthropologists working in peace and international security as a way of opening a dialog between that community and anthropologists.

As the first year of our collaboration ended, we faced two problems. First, if we were to make the symposium happen, we would need to find a way to support the travel costs of scholars from outside the West. Second, we needed a way to quickly bring a diverse group of people into meaningful engagements. Mickie found ways to meet both of these challenges.

It became obvious that we would need to find grant support for the symposium. But neither Mickie nor I had standing at a university that would allow us to submit a proposal for funding. Mickie enlisted David Mandelbaum at Berkeley. We prepared a proposal to the Ford Foundation, which Dave submitted. Mickie also suggested that we ask the American Anthropological Association to support the symposia. Both the foundation and the association awarded us grants, giving us nearly \$30,000 to support the participation of a wide variety of scholars. The American Anthropological Association also designated the symposia its official contribution to the Vancouver meetings.

To the second problem, Mickie suggested that we take advantage of the possibility of holding a "pre-conference" meeting, and she urged that we do this at one of the sites remote from Vancouver that would allow the symposium participants to spend time together informally as well as in our meetings. We had talked about the intense intellectual and emotional experiences during the Wenner-Gren meeting on symbolism that she had organized a few years earlier. Mickie wanted to reproduce that atmosphere as best as we could in the context of the IUAES experience. We arranged for the two days prior to the Vancouver meetings to be at Harrison Hot Springs, in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia on Harrison Lake.

In the event, we had four days of coordinated symposia with nearly forty participants. The first two days, at Harrison Hot Springs, set the tone: intense, honest, and emotionally charged. These four days were so profoundly engaging that they created a lasting bond among participants. It was suggested that we put forward a proposal to form a Commission on the Study of Peace. The group, encouraged and guided by Mickie, worked over a period of three or four days to draft the proposal to the IUAES Executive Committee which then created the commission. Mickie was the unanimous choice to head the commission. But she demurred, preferring instead that we harness some of the energy developed at the meeting. A three-person system of co-chairing the

commission was established. Margaret Clark, Valery Tishkov, and Peter Worsley became the first co-chairs of the commission, I the executive secretary.

Mickie and I had decided to edit the papers from the meeting into a book, and got the participants to send us revised and expanded versions of their papers. With those papers in hand, I went to Berkeley and spent two weeks with Mickie editing the papers. This was the first time I had been to Berkeley. Mickie and George met me at the airport and brought me back to their house on San Luis Road. Our conversation during that drive touched on their recent and planned travels. We arrived at sunset, and I recall being stunned by the physical beauty of the scene that spread before me. I recall blurting out, "How could you ever bring yourself to travel away from this place."

During the next two weeks we kept to an arduous schedule. By the end of the two weeks we had edited the twenty-seven papers that eventually were included in *Peace and War: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (Transaction Books, 1986). It was a hard job, but made easier by a shared sense of purpose and humor!

Although Mickie had declined to lead the commission, she continued her work in the area. She soon became a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Sciences Committee on Science, Arms Control and National Security. In that capacity she brought anthropology directly into the center of discussions about nuclear issues.

Working from within the AAAS, Mickie was able to get a double session--"Power, Change, and Security Decisions"--scheduled at the 1985 AAAS Annual meeting. Throughout these discussions Mickie urged a focus on local-level concerns and an understanding of the importance of non-elite actors for international security. Mickie thus added her voice to the established conversations about peace and international security issues. At the same time, at Berkeley and elsewhere, she also encouraged and supported a younger generation of scholars, some of whom have gone on to do important work in peace studies. At Mickie's urging, we included the work of some of these younger scholars in our second edited book, *The Social Dynamics of Peace and Conflict: Culture in International Security* (Westview Press, 1988).

From the mid-1980s through the 1990s, Mickie was instrumental in encouraging and creating opportunities to bring anthropology into policy discussions. These included IUAES Commission sponsored meetings in Moscow, in Kanpur, in Mexico City, and at regional and national meetings throughout the United States.

Mickie has been a prominent participant in many of these discussions. In those events she has blended her abiding interest in

symbolism with her passionate concern for conflict prevention. By lecturing to diverse audiences, Mickie has brought anthropological thinking to bear on peace and international security studies. She has engaged new theories, especially in her exploration of the relation of psychological reversals to war, and extended her own intellectual reach. As often as Mickie has been at the forefront and in the spotlight, she has worked behind the scenes to encourage and support others in their engagement of peace studies and anthropology.

Through this work, Mickie has influenced the debate in the field of peace and international security. For the past two years I have served together with Mickie on the board of the Ploughshares Fund. Watching discussions at those meetings, I recognize that Mickie has played a unique and effective role there. With persistence and humor she has enlarged the terms of discussion within the fund's board and brought anthropological concerns not only to the surface, but to the center.

In her own scholarship, Mickie has opened new areas of investigation linking symbolism and peace studies. She is widely recognized as playing a pivotal role in making peace a legitimate area of anthropological work. Her personal energy, keen intelligence, humor and compassion continue to inspire her students, colleagues, and friends.

Robert A. Rubinstein
Professor of Anthropology and of
International Relations
Syracuse University

Syracuse, New York
February 2001

INTERVIEW HISTORY by Suzanne Riess

This oral history with Mary LeCron Foster is concerned with three big subjects: family history, language origins, and conflict prevention. Mary LeCron Foster is an anthropologist whose work in language origins is her passion. It is work that is, as she says, "the greatest puzzle" and "the most fun." The challenges of that work, and her interest in family, both her family of birth and the family she has made, and her contributions to the search for peaceful solutions to conflict to which she has brought great professional and organizational skills, make her a multi-dimensional woman who has tried to do it all, and has succeeded.

When the Regional Oral History Office was first planning to tape oral history interviews with Mary LeCron Foster's husband, George M. Foster, I went to visit the Fosters at their home on San Luis Road, in Berkeley. It was November 1998. Mary and George and I sat at the kitchen/dining table and looked at a calendar to map out some future meetings. George Foster was a busy man, I was busy, Christmas was coming, and so he and I concluded that spring would be soon enough. With that, Mary Foster briskly suggested we get started the very next week, and indeed we did, and interviewed every week until we were finished. I was impressed with the burst of purpose that came from Mickie, but interested that after our joint planning meeting we two didn't meet again. Mickie spent most mornings at work in her office on the lower floor of the house--as she tells us, nothing is more satisfying than the time she spends researching across languages--and the oral history was George's to do.

The conclusion, in 1999, of the oral history interviews that George Foster and I did meant, for George, that the way was cleared for me to pick up and get going right away with Mickie's oral history. I agreed. We all knew that Mickie had been under treatment for cancer, and it was not an ideal time, but it was the time. As correspondence with Mickie [see appendices] shows, and as the text evidences, Mickie had strong ideas about where she wanted the oral history to go, and she wanted to do it, but she also was torn by her wish to be working on her "great puzzle" and her pervasive sense that time was running out. It was a hard time for her. To the extent that she was fully caught up in the interviewing sessions, she was happily engaged in what we were doing, but the narrative could unpredictably derail her emotionally.

Of course it was impossible not to empathize with this woman whose ability to be everywhere and do everything and to control her life and her responses was handicapped by illness. And it was impossible not to admire her self-awareness, while at the same time wishing her not to be so hard on herself. As an example, a note to me attached to a portion

of the text that Mickie edited reads, "Just doing the oral history shows me how interconnected my thinking has been in a sort of unconscious way. I am just as capable of trivial as of intelligent thinking, and I keep fearing that shows through too strongly in my reminiscences." She found herself interested in what the oral history revealed about her choices in life.

The Mary LeCron Foster interviews--the name "Mickie" gets its explanatory due in the text--began in January 2000. We met regularly. George was, as Mickie had been, similarly graciously out of sight, in his study at the other end of the living room, behind doors. That summer the transcript went with Mickie to the family country place in Calaveras County for her review, and it benefited from some light editing, minor corrections that didn't interfere with the original text. Mickie did attach a number of notes with thoughts about whole sections that should be moved, and suggested emendations to discussions that had petered out unsatisfactorily in the interviews--all of which were carried out.

Perhaps hardest for her in the last analysis was the assignment she set herself to draw a conclusion, to write her own "finale" to the text. That difficulty was exacerbated by a build-up of things Mickie needed to do--her e-mails to me were little essays in despair about how to find time. But with finesse and a great sense of relief she brought herself to write an ending in February 2001, and her concluding words turned out to be words of thanks for her life.

Thanks for Mickie's work, and her life, are at the core of the introductions to the oral history written by Robert Rubinstein and Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, colleagues both, admirers both. At the formal presentation in the Anthropology Library at Berkeley on March 5, 2001, of George Foster's completed oral history, and Mickie's almost completed oral history, Rubinstein came out from Syracuse, New York, to read yet another set of finely-crafted words summing up Mickie's role in putting the skills of anthropologists to work in peace and conflict studies--that essay is in the appendices. The presentation was a great event, with the University well represented, along with the Department of Anthropology, Foster friends, and extended Foster family. Among those in the audience was Jan Thomas, whose appended interview with Mary LeCron Foster does an excellent job of articulating Mickie's theories. The rest of the appendices further underscore the range of Mickie's work.

This interview history is in large measure written from my personal point of view of Mickie. During the interviews I knew that sometimes she was in pain or distress, and speaking from frustration--we talked a little about that. I knew that we were meeting under the forms and constraints of the oral history interviews, and that I didn't really know her as I might have an old friend. But I saw and heard a friend

that I could well imagine, and I enjoyed her delight in beautiful things, in interesting clothing, in the books she would recommend. I loved knowing about the plants in her garden, and seeing the texts of old family letters and pictures that fascinated her with what they revealed. I appreciated beyond measure how she had come to see herself so clearly.

Mary LeCron Foster's and George M. Foster's oral histories are the first two completed in an anticipated series of memoirs with individuals whose careers have been central to the history of the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley. Interviews have been done with J. Desmond Clark, and a group of his colleagues in paleoarchaeology, and with social and cultural anthropologists Elizabeth Colson and Burton Benedict. The stories behind the story of Berkeley's pre-eminence in anthropology are being put on record. My thanks to Suzanne Calpestri, librarian of the George and Mary Foster Anthropology Library, who in numerous ways has been guardian angel to this project; to the Regional Oral History Office staff; to J. R. K. Kantor for his proofreading; and to Robert Rubinstein and Jan Thomas for their contributions in words and deeds.

The Regional Oral History Office was established in 1954 to augment through tape-recorded memoirs the Library's materials on the history of California and the West. Copies of all interviews are available for research use in The Bancroft Library and in the UCLA Department of Special Collections. The office is under the direction of Ann Lage, Deputy Director, and the administrative direction of Charles B. Faulhaber, The James D. Hart Director of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Suzanne B. Riess
Senior Editor

April 2001
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

Regional Oral History Office
Room 486 The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California 94720

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly. Use black ink.)

Your full name Mary Frazer LeCron Foster

Date of birth Feb. 1, 1914 Birthplace DesMoines, Iowa

Father's full name James DeFrees LeCron

Occupation journalist Birthplace Waynesboro, PA

Mother's full name Helen Cowles LeCron

Occupation writer Birthplace Algona, Iowa

Your spouse George McClelland Foster, Jr.

Occupation anthropologist Birthplace Sioux Falls, SD

Your children Jeremy Foster, Melissa Foster Bowerman

Where did you grow up? DesMoines, Iowa

Present community Berkeley, CA

Education BA, Northwestern University; Ph.D., linguistics, University
of California, Berkeley

Occupation(s) linguistic anthropologist

Areas of expertise global language reconstruction; Mexican Indian
language; symbolic anthropology

Other interests or activities peace and conflict

Organizations in which you are active Board of Ploughshares Fund, San Francisco;
research associate, Department of Anthropology, UC Berkeley

SIGNATURE _____

DATE: _____

I FAMILY

[Interview 1: January 24, 2000] ##¹

Grandparents

Riess: I'd like you to start with your memories of your grandparents. In your sister's oral history, your father's parents are somewhat less thoroughly described than your mother's.²

M. Foster: They mostly didn't live where we lived, so we didn't see as much of them. And our mother's parents were very much a part of our lives always. That's really why. My maternal grandparents were more successful. They were important people in Des Moines, and they were more dynamic than my father's parents.

My father's parents were quiet, and my father's father had not been successful in anything that he'd tried. They were always having financial problems, they always were having to move, and if they came to live in Des Moines, which they did part of the time, they lived in rather limited quarters and maybe in houses that had upstairs for rent or something like that, whereas my maternal grandparents had built, I think in 1910, a very large house with beautiful large green grounds, and they were on a street that was not the oldest important residential street in Des Moines, but next to it.

¹## This symbol indicates that a tape or tape segment has begun or ended. A guide to the tapes follows the transcript.

²Florence LeCron Jurs, *Volunteer Leader in the East Bay: Oakland Potluck, A Central Place, and Children's Services, 1939-1994*, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1996.

Des Moines was sort of a geographically interesting town because it's built on two rivers. The Des Moines River cuts across the town separating east from west, and the west side is the more prestigious side. The east side was actually, I think, the older side, but as usually happens, people moved out of that and other people moved in, so that it became less residentially desirable.

Riess: Were there railroad tracks, so there was an "other" side of the tracks?

M. Foster: Yes, see, we were on two rivers. The other river was the Raccoon River, and our house, that my parents built when I was three years old, was on a bluff overlooking the Raccoon River Valley, which was not settled. The bluff fell off very steeply below our house, and down at the bottom of this steep embankment were the railroad tracks. We were very aware of the trains always, but it didn't bother us much unless they whistled. If they whistled, you had to cut off your telephone conversation, or stop talking, because nobody on the phone could hear you, and that was just part of life.

I always enjoyed the trains, especially at night, because from my bed I could look down and see the cars with their lights on in their public rooms. So I could imagine the people eating in the dining car, or the people in their sleeping berths, or whatever. I liked to see the lights go by because it seemed romantic to me. I love the sound of the train whistles. It kind of makes me nostalgic. Now, of course, the trains are different because they're not steam. They used to burn coal.

Riess: Was there shipping traffic on the river that was also interesting?

M. Foster: No, the river was too far from us. There was a big valley before we came to the river, so we couldn't really see the river terribly well. We saw the trees that were along the river, but it was quite a good distance away.

Riess: Isn't that an area that floods all the time?

M. Foster: It didn't use to, I don't think so much, at least I don't remember floods. Recently there have been disasters with the river, and that's the Raccoon River, which is always called the Coon River.

Riess: It must have been wonderful to have two sets of grandparents nearby. But they were in some ways different?

M. Foster: I loved them both, I loved being with them. Our maternal grandparents were the ones who gave us the fancy presents for Christmas, you know, whatever we most wanted; the biggest present always came from our maternal grandparents. And our paternal grandparents--that grandmother [Mary Frazer LeCron] sewed clothes for our dolls. She was very sweet, quiet, kind, helpful, and in a way I think I felt more kind of overt affection for her than I did for my maternal grandmother, always referred to as Grandma Cowles [Florence Call Cowles].

My paternal grandmother is Grandma LeCron, and Grandma LeCron, when she was living in Des Moines, which was off and on, would have us come over for the day, and she had trunks full of things that my dad had made when he was little. So it was kind of a reminiscence time--sort of heritage time to be with her and talk to her. She had two sons, and my father [James DeFries LeCron] was the oldest, seven years older than his brother Leslie. My father was a ten-pound baby, and his mother was rather small, so it was a very difficult delivery, and she had not wanted to have more children. When she did have another child, seven years later, it went okay--the next baby, Leslie, was not outsized.

But that meant that my father was seven years older than his sibling, and he and his friends teased Leslie, played lots of jokes on Leslie, which they enjoyed a great deal. When I grew up enough so that Leslie would talk about these things to me, it turned out that Leslie had not been at all happy with tricks that had been played on him, and he cherished quite a lot of rancor against my father and his friends. But my father was a great trickster; he was funny and he loved practical jokes, so he practiced his practical jokes on poor little Leslie.

Riess: That decision about not having a child for seven years, you don't think that it was made because of economic issues?

M. Foster: I don't think so. I don't think in those days people really thought in those terms much. They always said, "When our ship comes in--." They always expected that they were going to have more success. And I can't tell you all the things my grandfather tried. The only things I remember were the most disastrous ones: they were selling land in Florida, which seemed like a great bonanza, you'd just buy it, and you'd get rich fast. But it turned out the land was under water. He was very gullible, I think, because he fell for a lot of fraudulent deals, and that was one reason he was so unsuccessful. He couldn't seem to quite get his act together.

I've thought quite a bit about his family. He had a brother who was a very, very skilled and successful dentist, and during the First World War, Uncle Dan--as I knew him--was sent overseas to take care of the soldiers that had had their jaws shot apart, and he had lots of before-and-after-pictures of the soldiers. Well, I guess they mostly were after--he wouldn't have known the people before. I remember these horror photos that Uncle Dan had--yes, it was before-and-after, because he would reconstruct their jaws, so he had pictures of their reconstructed faces. That was very interesting.

Uncle Dan, since he used gold to fill teeth and make false teeth, or whatever he did, also made things out of gold. He gave my mother [Helen Cowles LeCron] a beautiful little bulldog pin with a long clasp that she used to fasten her collar--women wore neckties in those days. I always loved that pin. And a little ring that he made came down to me. It was shaped like a rose, with a little blue stone in the middle, like a dew drop. I loved that ring. Uncle Dan--I didn't see him very often, but when he did come to town it was a big treat. His son became a very famous dentist in London, sort of the upper-crust dentist in London, and he married a Ziegfeld Follies showgirl--very beautiful, very tall, showgirls were the tall ones. Later, when we went to Europe, we visited them, and got acquainted with them.

Both families were quite closely knit. My Grandfather LeCron [Simon LeCron] had mostly sisters. People had big families; they weren't Catholics, but everybody had big families in those days. [interruption]

Riess: The families were closely knit, you were saying.

M. Foster: Well, we almost always had Sunday dinner, one o'clock Sunday dinner at my grandmother Cowles' house, and if my paternal grandparents were in town, she invited them. To that extent they saw each other, but they weren't particularly friends otherwise.³

³[Foster adds in a later note: Suzanne, In your questions you greatly overemphasized the financial difference between my grandparents. It didn't make for any kind of social difference. Their social statuses would have been much the same as had been their earlier family histories. My paternal grandparents had pretty similar backgrounds. You keep coming back to what seems to you a disparity. Since I spoke of financial difference on the first pages, for you it took on an unjustified importance. Uncle Dan was financially very successful, as his brother, my grandfather, was not. Their two sisters married successful men, and the family was prominent in

My mother's next youngest sister was seven years younger than she was. Her name was Bertha, and she and my father's brother Leslie became good friends. They were age-mates, and so there were cross-family ties, I guess, in a certain sense.

Later in their lives my LeCron grandparents moved to California, and my Grandma LeCron died in Los Angeles when I was fourteen.

Riess: Why did they move to California?

M. Foster: Because my Uncle Leslie had gone to California. They lived with him.

He didn't get married until quite late. Ultimately he was married three times. He had a child by both the first marriage and the last marriage, so the child by the last marriage is almost the age of my grandchildren. He and his wife were here yesterday with their year-and-a-half-old baby girl. They live in Santa Barbara--they're both architects. He is a very dear young man and we enjoy them very much. Her parents live in Hayward, so they are up here quite often and come and see us.

Riess: Well, that's interesting. Has anyone in the family taken on the job of being the archivist?

M. Foster: Just recently the daughter of one of my maternal uncles--her father is the same age as my sister's oldest daughter, so you see that there is a stretch on both sides. Anyway, the parents divorced when the children were quite young, and the mother moved to France with the girls. (The father, who's remarried, lives in Minneapolis.) This daughter started trying to get together the family history and making a book of it. She has been compiling everybody's records of their descendants, and what they do and where they live, so that's sort of interesting. I've never met the girl--the family has hardly known her because they lived abroad for so long.

Waynesboro, Pennsylvania, which we visited when I was about eleven years old--another married sister lived in Oak Park, Illinois, where her daughter was a much beloved high-school teacher. As I have said, both families were close knit, and aside from geographical placements saw each other as often as possible. I emphasized my maternal kin more because some of them lived in my home town. Somehow I gave you the impression of a social gap, which did not exist. MF]

Riess: Leslie coming to California reminds me of the phenomenon of the Iowa migrations to southern California.

M. Foster: Oh yes, Long Beach. Long Beach used to have an Iowa picnic every year.

Riess: What was the meaning of all of that--going to California?

M. Foster: What I remember about it was that one of my father's closest friends at Northwestern University--both my father and my mother graduated from Northwestern--had gone to California, to San Jose. And he used to write letters to my father about how wonderful it was--the palm trees and the warm weather, and so on. In San Jose! [laughs] Dad used to read us the passages in these letters about it, so we knew California was a wonderful place, but I don't really know other people who went. You know, it was hard to get to California in those days. You had to take a long train trip.

Riess: But the Iowa migrations?

M. Foster: Yes, lots of people did go from Iowa. I just don't happen to know any of them. That's the only person I can think of that I knew. Except my uncle Leslie, who was sort of like his father, "waiting for his ship to come in." He kept trying different things that weren't very successful. I think at one point he had something to do with filling stations, but I can't quite remember that one. But then he began manufacturing tennis rackets.

Riess: And this was when he was in southern California?

M. Foster: He went to California when he was involved in the tennis racket business. He imported his materials from Japan. I think he had the rackets made in Japan and had them strung in Los Angeles. I can't quite remember. But the Depression came along, and I think that was when the bottom fell out of that one. I can't quite remember why that was not successful, but it was through no fault of Leslie's. There was some other set of circumstances. And he became a hypnotherapist, but that's such a long story, I think I'd rather save that.

Riess: I hope you won't forget it. That's seems a very California story, not an Iowa story.

M. Foster: It was an Iowa story. All my mother's Iowa relatives were interested in the paranormal--I think it was quite a fad in those days. People were interested in things like hypnotism, and people were interested in spiritualism. I remember my

grandmother Cowles and her sisters and some of her friends had a Ouija board. You know, people were interested in whether there was any way of getting in contact with the spirit world.

Riess: Would they have séances?

M. Foster: I think they just played with the Ouija board. It became kind of a game; people were experimenting with the Ouija board. My grandmother Cowles and her sisters really felt that they had some sort of second sight of some kind.

For example, when Grandma LeCron died, Grandma Cowles telephoned and said to my mother, "Helen, is everything all right at your house?" And my mother said, "No, my mother-in-law died." And Grandma Cowles said, "I felt that there was something wrong." You see? There were other times when she felt something was wrong too, so you didn't put too much stock in this. But they really did feel that they could sense things.

Riess: Did this substitute for religion?

M. Foster: Well, Grandma Cowles' father was an atheist. He was the founder of a small town called Algona in northern Iowa. He and his brother went out to Algona in covered wagons and founded this town.

Riess: Did they give it that name?

M. Foster: I think it was an Indian name.⁴ In any event, I think my grandmother was the first baby born in Algona, and my mother was also born in Algona. I was born in Des Moines because my grandparents had moved to Des Moines, and my parents, just before I was born, moved to Des Moines.

Riess: They moved from Wyoming.

M. Foster: Yes. They lived in Wyoming.

⁴I read later that it was not Indian, but a name invented by one of the early settlers. MF

Parents, Extended Family

M. Foster: After college my father had gone to Wyoming, and he loved the mountains, he just loved Wyoming. He was a very skilled amateur photographer. He took beautiful photographs of the Wyoming wilderness and the mountains. Later on he said, "I wish I had taken more photographs of people and towns because that's the thing that changes." The landscape didn't change. However, after he died, the University of Wyoming asked for his photographic slides, collections, whatever.

Riess: What kind of photographic process was it, I wonder?

M. Foster: Oh, he experimented with so many processes. He experimented with color photographs when they were on glass plates. He experimented with stereoscopic photography. He was terribly experimental.

Riess: What had he studied at Northwestern?

M. Foster: English. Both of my parents majored in English. My parents met at Northwestern as English majors, and they both were very literary. They both could recite a great deal of poetry. When we'd go on trips they would recite poetry to each other--sort of taking turns, chiming in if they wanted to. My sister and I sat in the back seat on these trips and listened.

We weren't encouraged at school to memorize--well, we were encouraged much more than people are now to memorize. Nowadays nobody memorizes poetry. Schools have changed completely, which is too bad. My English daughter-in-law can recite a great deal of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example. She memorized a lot of Shakespeare. If we memorized things they were kind of lesser things by American poets that didn't really have the same significance.

Riess: There was a whole system involved in training the memory.

M. Foster: It's very valuable, I think. Children nowadays should be having more of that.

When I was teaching linguistics I used to make my introductory linguistics students memorize the phonetic alphabet, and a lot of special kinds of linguistic terms and so on--and it made them so angry. I said, "You'll be happy later on because you'll have these under your belt, and you'll know what they mean, so you can go on thinking about these things. If you don't memorize them, you don't." I persuaded them that

they had to memorize, but that was not a popular part of my course.

Riess: I wonder, as people living in Des Moines whose business was the newspaper, did you have a sense of being Midwestern, or did you feel like you were in the center of the world?

M. Foster: No, it was the center of the world [laughs]. Geographically it is the center of the United States, so you felt as if you were just as close to the East and West Coast--we actually were farther from the West Coast. But you had to travel by overnight trains to get either to the East Coast or the West Coast. I think people nowadays think the world is so much smaller. The world was a big place when I grew up.

Riess: Was Wyoming, for your father, a kind of Wild West?

M. Foster: Oh, I think so, very Wild West. My father was very adventurous, he liked to travel, he liked to try new things. That was the story of my growing up--was my father's adventurous spirit [laughs].

Riess: And how did he finance that time in Wyoming?

M. Foster: He got jobs when he got there. He worked, he became a court reporter, among other things. Then he began working for a judge who became the governor of the state, I think while my father was still working for him. My father actually planned to study law--and he would have gone back to college to study law except that in those days, and perhaps now, I don't know, you can study it under a judge.

Riess: Yes, you can read for the law.

M. Foster: "Read for the law"--that's what he was doing in Wyoming. But he was always working, earning his living while he was reading. I think probably the judge perhaps paid him because I think he was doing secretarial things for the judge too. But, my father was very literate, very well read, a very good writer, so I don't think he had trouble making both ends meet.

Riess: Did your mother grew up in relative privilege?

M. Foster: No, not really. It was when she was in the upper side of high school and during college that her father became so prosperous. My mother grew up in Algona, Iowa, which was a very small town. As I said earlier, my Great-Grandfather Call, my mother's grandfather, was Ambrose Call, and his brother was Asa Call, and they had gone out there in a covered wagon and decided that

this was a good place to found a town, because it was on a river, and they thought the railroad would come through. As it turned out, the railroad did not come through Algona. So, Algona stayed kind of a small, unimportant, agricultural town.

Both my maternal grandparents graduated from college, which I find is very unusual among people my age, but my grandmother's father, Ambrose Call, was determined that his children be well educated. And he had mostly daughters, in fact, he had daughters for quite a long time before he had sons. He finally had one son, who died, and then he had two sons who lived, but they were quite a bit younger than the girls. My grandmother [Florence Call Cowles] was the oldest. Great-Grandfather Call was determined that his daughters were going to college. And he was going to send them abroad to study so they would learn French and German. He had great plans for them.

My grandmother first went to a small women's college in Iowa--I think it was a women's college, it might have been Iowa Women's College, something like that. It was in a small town, I can't think where. I think she went two years there and then she transferred to Northwestern.

Riess: I think after two years at a normal school you could become a teacher.

M. Foster: Yes, it was probably more or less a normal school because she did become a teacher. But then she went to Northwestern.

Northwestern had started out as a women's college, but when my grandmother got there, it was no longer a women's college. Also originally it was a Methodist college--private colleges almost always had some religious tie. Northwestern, I think, still had chapel when my parents were there. But by the time I got there, the chapel was long gone and nobody paid much attention to religion at all.

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M. Foster: Nowadays I think it perhaps surprises us that that much attention would be given to daughters, that you would just naturally expect them to go to college.

Riess: An oldest daughter sometimes gets childcare responsibilities in a household of many children.

M. Foster: They always had a hired girl. They were called "hired girls" and they tended to be German, from German communities--there

were a lot of German communities in Iowa. Farm girls who would come in and live in town and have some advantages that they hadn't had at home. I think the household help situation was pretty easy to solve.

Riess: Well, there is a great line of family. And a lot of girls.

M. Foster: There are a lot of girls. And then my sister had four girls. I had a boy and a girl.

Children died more often in those days too, so that often you'd have a son, as my grandparents did, and lose him when he was very young. George's family also lost a son--George's grandparents.

Riess: I think what set us off on this course was my assuming that your mother had come from a more privileged background than your father.

M. Foster: Well, I suppose in a way she did because her grandfather was the founder of the town, so he was a very respected citizen.

My grandmother by that time was back in Algona teaching school. My grandfather [Gardner Cowles] applied for the job of principal of the high school in Algona, after he graduated from college. He was very young, an up-and-coming nice young principal who came to town while my grandmother was teaching in the high school. He was only about seventeen, I think, but he fudged his age. My grandmother was several years older than he, but because he fudged his age she was actually even older.

My grandmother's letters--her sisters were away at college at that time--those letters between my grandmother and her sisters when they were in college were always very interesting. It was exciting when he came to town, so she'd write about him to her sisters. His name was Gardner Cowles, and they called him "*le petit jardinier*." They used to write to each other in French, and they called him, "the little gardener, *le petit jardinier*." (He came to be called Gardie.)

Riess: They got married soon after he arrived?

M. Foster: I'm not quite sure how much time went by. I suppose fairly soon he started courting her.

Newspaper Business

Riess: How did he get into the newspaper business?

M. Foster: Well, it wasn't the newspaper business to begin with. He had some kind of a mail franchise.

Riess: Mail distribution?

M. Foster: Yes, there was no federal mail service in those days, so rural areas had to have their own mail systems, and I guess he bought it.

Riess: While he was still a school principal?

M. Foster: Yes, I think while he was still a school principal. But he moved from being school principal into this business, and he did that for quite a while. It was successful.

He had a close friend named Harvey Ingham, and when the Des Moines newspaper came up for sale, Grandpa and Harvey Ingham decided to buy this newspaper, and go to Des Moines and run a newspaper. Harvey became the editor, and Grandpa became the publisher. And they little by little acquired the other newspapers in Des Moines. They came to have pretty much of a monopoly in Iowa where the *Des Moines Register and Tribune* is the Iowa newspaper. If you listen to the caucus things on TV, they're always talking about the articles in the *Des Moines Register*. Our family no longer owns it, but we did for a long time.

Riess: Being in the newspaper business, I mean your family's connection to it--do you think that your family was more aware, more sophisticated? Did that make you more worldly?

M. Foster: Oh, they were very interested in politics, they were very interested in foreign relations. The Sunday dinner table conversations were always extremely interesting.

Riess: What was the political orientation of the paper?

M. Foster: That was extremely interesting. My grandfather was a very conservative Republican, and my father was a very liberal Democrat. My father's father was a Democrat. My father and his father used to discuss politics all the time, and I found it exceedingly boring, but I used to listen to it [laughs].

Riess: But at least they discussed it in agreement.

M. Foster: My father and his father discussed it in agreement. But at the family dinners at my maternal grandparents' there was always great argumentation. My father and the husband of one of my mother's younger sisters were the two Democrats. The women-- I've thought about this quite a lot because I don't remember the women speaking up on politics at all. In fact, the men dominated the dinner table conversation on Sunday.

Riess: How was the seating? Was it by couples?

M. Foster: No, seating was any way. My grandmother sat at one end, my grandfather sat at the other--that was fixed. Otherwise, people sort of distributed themselves.

Riess: And was conversation always general?

M. Foster: Very general. Everybody talked.

Riess: No little side conversations.

M. Foster: Not at all. That took place both before and after dinner, where the men would go off, and the women would go off and talk. I always liked hearing the men better than the women. I thought the women were boring because they talked about households and children, things like that.

Riess: It shouldn't necessarily have been so, you had so many well-educated women.

Mother, A Writer

M. Foster: They were all well educated, they all went to college. My mother was the only one who had a career. She was the literary editor of the *Des Moines Register*. But she forged that career for herself. Actually, she forged her career when they lived in Wyoming, because my father was not making very much money and she wanted more help. My mother always hated housework, so she began sending her poems off to publishers and getting them printed and getting paid.

Riess: I don't think of really making money on poems.

M. Foster: Well, she became a syndicated poet. But I think that was after she was in Des Moines. She wrote under a pseudonym. Her pseudonym was Martha Hart. So, Martha Hart's poems always appeared in the Sunday paper--maybe they were in the daily

paper too, I don't really remember. But she was always syndicated.

Riess: Writing as Martha Hart--certainly the people on the paper knew who she was.

M. Foster: Oh, of course. I don't know why she--I think she took that pseudonym when she was still in Wyoming.

Riess: She probably didn't want any accusations of nepotism?

M. Foster: Well, my mother was kind of a snob, in the sense that she loved literature, and I think she wrote under a pseudonym because she didn't think that the kind of writing she did for the newspaper was prestigious in a literary sense--it was popular stuff. Her Martha Hart poems were about the daily lives of housewives and children, things like that. They were jingly sort of rhymes.

Riess: Condescensions to the popular taste?

M. Foster: Oh, not condescensions! She enjoyed writing them, and she was good at thinking up themes. But she didn't, I don't think, want herself thought of as sort of--Edgar Guest, was the popular syndicated poet, and she really didn't want to be in the same league as Edgar Guest under her own name.

Riess: Did she write other things that she thought of as literature?

M. Foster: Yes, her book page in the Des Moines Sunday paper. That she wrote under her own name. And then she began publishing books. But they were pretty much popular books.

My mother had a friend, Louise Weaver, who wrote a nutrition column, recipe column, and she and my mother decided they would write a cookbook. My mother's idea was to write a little story that went along with the recipes. So Louise Weaver and my sister Florence--whom I called Bunny, so I have to call her Bunny here, I can't call her Florence--and Mumsie set out for Colorado.

"Mumsie"--that's another story. Bunny and I, when we were about three or four years old, decided to call our mother "Mumsie." She didn't like to be called "Mama," so we were trying to decide what to call her that she would agree to. We thought about "Mummy" and then we thought, no that's an Egyptian mummy. (At that age, how we knew about Egyptian mummies I can't say, but we did.) And so we decided on "Mumsie." She said that was fine. So we always called her "Mumsie."

Anyway, we went out to Estes Park on the train, Louise and Mumsie and Bunny and me. We had two lower berths--they didn't have much money--and I had to share one with Louise, and Bunny had to share one with Mumsie. But Louise was a young, fat woman--a good food editor!--and on the first night I fell out of the berth onto the floor of the train [laughs]. So they made Bunny switch, made Bunny sleep with Louise after that.

That first train voyage, that was a real adventure.

Riess: And how old were you?

M. Foster: About seven.

We got to Denver and we stayed in a hotel called the Oxford Hotel that was across the street from the railroad station, that first night. And then we took an open bus that took people up to the park--terribly exciting--and we stayed in a hotel out by itself called the Horseshoe Inn. The West was--oh! such a wonderful experience! The mountains, and the stones, the rocks--I just--and the streams! All of the mountain atmosphere just got into my blood, I just loved it!

Riess: So, you were going to Estes Park--

M. Foster: --so they could write. They were getting off by themselves to write their cookbook. Bunny and I--Louise wasn't married then, had no children, so we were just little appendages.

Riess: Why weren't you left home?

M. Foster: Who would have looked after us at home?

Riess: One of the sisters?

M. Foster: My mother's sisters? My mother was the oldest of six children. Her next youngest brother was quite close to her in age--he was Russell Cowles, and he became a painter. Then came Bertha, who was seven years younger than my mother, so there was about a five-year gap between Russell and Bertha. Bertha married an Algona man and lived in Algona. She was married when I was two. Since they lived in Algona, they did come to Des Moines some, so we saw them, and we went to Algona sometimes too, but she was not there. And the next youngest sister was Florence called "Flo"--my sister hated being called "Flo" because she wasn't that fond of Aunt Flo.

I don't think it ever would have occurred to my mother to leave us behind. Dad--we always had a maid in my childhood,

and the first maid was Anna, she was Swedish. I suppose while we were gone Anna, perhaps, cooked for my father and looked after my father. I don't know how long we stayed, it seemed like a long time to me. But probably it was not that long. When you're little, you don't think in terms of time exactly.

Riess: Do you think of your mother as a role model? Can you think in those terms of women or men you admired particularly?

M. Foster: If I think about why I turned out the way I did, I think the fact that my mother was unusual in that she worked--I really had only one other friend whose mother worked, and her mother worked because she was divorced, and she sold real estate. You know, you can learn to be a real estate agent. So she worked, but other than that I can't remember any mothers who worked.

Riess: Your mother might have characterized it differently. Instead of saying she worked, she might have said, "I'm a writer."

M. Foster: Well, the point I'm making is that she did something besides household and childcare, where her other friends didn't. She had good friends in Des Moines, and many of them were extremely well-educated, very literate women, but it didn't occur to them to hold jobs. It didn't really occur to my generation much either, except as the Depression came along. So my college friends were worried for fear they wouldn't be able to support themselves. Almost all of them took education courses so they could fall back on teaching, if they had to, because that was a career that was always open to women.

Riess: Do you think that your mother would have written and had the same life if she hadn't been paid for it?

M. Foster: I think she would have. She had a notebook, a little binder, and in gold letters on it it said "Old Dog Tray." That was her notebook that she'd write in. And she always had a pencil on hand, a brown, number two pencil. Old Dog Tray was always with her, "ever faithful." We never read anything she wrote in Old Dog Tray. That was sort of sacrosanct.

Riess: Where is that now?

M. Foster: Old Dog Tray? She threw everything--my mother was a great thrower-away of things. She didn't save anything. My father used to save stuff, but my mother never did.

Riess: The letters of your grandmother to her sisters in French?

M. Foster: My mother started collecting old family letters from all of her relatives when I was in college, I guess, or maybe later. She wrote to everybody and said, "Do you have old letters that came down in our family?" And so they all sent these letters to her, wonderful, wonderful letters, and she compiled them. She got a secretary--she always had a secretary--she had this secretary type up these letters.

Bunny and I--after she died we had the letters, and we read the letters and compared them with the typescript. We discovered that she had corrected their grammar, she had corrected their spelling [laughs]. We thought this was quite funny.

Unfortunately, sometime after that George and I went to Mexico--we were doing fieldwork--and Bunny was left sort of holding the bag. My Aunt Flo wrote to Bunny and said she knew about these letters, and that she would like to have them. So Bunny sent the whole thing, including the typescripts, off to Flo. As far as I could tell, they were lost. But then one of Flo's granddaughters turned out to have them, and she still has them. I used to think I might do something with them, but I've been so busy otherwise, I just really never wanted to put in time and so, I guess if anything ever gets done with it--she did a little bit on my grandmother's college years, but that's all.

Riess: It's so simple to Xerox the whole business. There should be at least another copy.

M. Foster: I suppose so, I should write to her. I'm lazy. I'm busy and I'm lazy, and I don't do it Suzanne! [laughs]

Religion

Riess: When you were talking about spiritualism, and the Ouija board, I asked you whether that was a substitute for religion--

M. Foster: Communicating with the dead, I guess you'd call it.

Riess: --or trying to communicate with the dead. I asked if it was a substitute for religion, and you talked about your great-great grandfather, but I am interested in the religious question.

M. Foster: I am too; I think it's very interesting. My grandfather Cowles was the son of a Methodist minister. And he married my

grandmother, who was the daughter of an atheist. And my grandfather's father--in those days ministers would be in one community for a year or two and move on to some other community, they were always transferred around among churches. So he lived in various small towns in Iowa as he was growing up.

His mother died when he was quite young, and his father remarried. His father remarried a woman who had a son who was about my grandfather's age. Her first husband had been a successful man--I don't know what he did, but he had quite a lot of money. And this son, who was the step-brother, had all kinds of toys, all kinds of things as he was growing up. And my grandfather was quite envious. Somehow or other it didn't get shared around, it stayed with her son.

So, my grandfather--when I was in college my parents were in Washington, and Des Moines was closer, so I used to come home from college and stay with my grandparents. My grandfather had retired. He was an elderly man and he liked to sit around and reminisce. So he would tell me things. I was always scared of my grandfather Cowles. The reason I was scared of him was because he asked us arithmetic questions. After dinner on Sundays he would pace back and forth between the rooms--they were attached to each other--and if any of the kids happened to get in his path, he would take them by the arm and begin walking with them and asking them arithmetic questions. I was never very good at arithmetic--I hated arithmetic actually, and it frightened me.

My grandfather was kind of a shy man, I think. He was terribly well respected. Everybody thought he was just wonderful, he was so fair to everybody. As the publisher of the paper he was revered by all the employees, but as far as the grand-daughters--Bunny and I were both scared of him. My cousin, David, my Aunt Flo's oldest son, has always told me how close he felt to Grandpa and I said, "Weren't you scared?" He was scared of my father! My father never scared me, and I couldn't imagine that, but my father was a tease, and that scared David.

But Grandpa and David would go off and take long drives through the country. My grandfather loved to take drives, looking at the corn. He loved the corn. Iowa is a very fertile, very prosperous state, and he just enjoyed driving through the countryside and seeing how prosperous it was, I think.

Riess: You were saying that your grandfather's step-brother was so privileged; you were making some point.

M. Foster: Yes, my point was that my grandfather was envious, so envious of this that he determined he was going to make money. He was going to become wealthy too.

Riess: I see, so that really motivated him.

M. Foster: He was very motivated, and he did.

Riess: Well, what is the story of religion in the family?

M. Foster: The story of religion has always been interesting. None of us were baptized--and I don't think my grandparents had any of their children baptized. Even though my grandfather was religious he wasn't religious in a very sectarian way. He liked to go to church on Sunday because he liked to hear what the ministers would say, but he didn't belong to a church. He tried different churches. He'd go a different place every Sunday to listen to the sermon. But Grandma wouldn't go with him.

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M. Foster: My father was an atheist. My mother was a believer, but she was not a churchgoer. She had her own sort of quiet, private belief system, which was probably more like Christian Science than anything else. I can't think, what--it has a name, and it still goes on. But it never appealed to me at all. In fact, Bunny and I used to kind of make fun of it.

Riess: Was it kind of positive thinking?

M. Foster: Yes, that kind of thing. I think "Unity" was in the name. Think good thoughts and all will be well.

Household Help

Riess: How about how to treat your fellow man? Were there any fellow men to even think of in Des Moines? Any blacks?

M. Foster: There were blacks--I didn't get to this, but my best friend was black. He was my grandmother's chauffeur. His name was George Timmony. And I loved him. He was so nice to me. He called me "Fats." I don't think I was ever fat, but I had a round face

and he called me "Fats." He was so sweet to me. He'd do errands for my grandmother in the car, and he'd take me with him. I would tell him things I wouldn't tell anybody. I'd really talk to George. George was jolly. George had dimples. He had a wonderful brown face with sweet dimples. He really was the person I told things to. I didn't tell things to my parents.

Riess: At the end of the day, did George go home to someplace on the other side of the river?

M. Foster: Oh, no. My grandparents house was on a big lot, and it sort of sloped down, and down at the back of the lot there was a garage with living quarters above. That's where George and his wife lived. She was the laundress, and George was the chauffeur.

The reason my grandparents had a chauffeur--my grandfather decided to buy a car, but then when he went out and tried to drive it, he had an accident. This scared him, and he decided he wasn't cut out for driving, so he would get somebody to drive for him. That's why they had this couple.

George did other things. They had a cow when I was little, and George milked the cow and brought milk to our house from the cow. We weren't in the country, but we were sort of on the edge of the town. My grandparents' house was only a few blocks from our house. George was the chauffeur, but also the handyman doing all kinds of things.

Riess: What was the quality that made George such a good person to talk to?

M. Foster: He was just sweet and open.

Riess: Did he talk? Or did he just let you talk?

M. Foster: Oh, we talked. He had wonderful sisters, too, who sometimes came and did what's called "babysitting" now, with us, when my parents needed somebody to be there with us. And we loved them. We used to play games with them.

Riess: Are you saying that you were blind to his different skin color?

M. Foster: I must have been aware of it, because he had a nice brown face that I loved.

We also had a laundress, whose name was Mrs. Flaherty, and her husband, Mr. Flaherty, came early in the morning to shake down our furnace. Everybody had a coal furnace in those

days. We'd hear Mr. Flaherty shaking down the furnace in the morning to get the fire started. Every morning in the winter, Mr. Flaherty struggled up the hill--they lived down in the valley, which was called "the hollow," below us. It was kind of a poor area.

Riess: Were the Flahertys black?

M. Foster: The Flahertys were white. I don't think any blacks lived there.

Mrs. Flaherty came every Tuesday and did our laundry, and she'd come on other days too, if special things had to be done at our house. So we grew up very close to Mrs. Flaherty, whom we called "Flaherty." She called her husband "Flaherty," and we called her "Flaherty."

Their daughter Eleanor used to babysit with us, and Eleanor was very pretty. She was a teenager. We admired Eleanor a lot. Eleanor taught us to sew. We played wonderful games with Eleanor when our parents would go out in the evening and Eleanor would look after us. We'd play "bear." Bunny was always the bear. Eleanor and I were the people escaping from the bear--and we were safe on the furniture. So we would leap as fast as we could from chair to couch to chair, trying to get away from the bear.

Riess: Lots of shrieking! [laughs]

M. Foster: Oh, lots of shrieking, it was a wild game! Anyway, we loved Eleanor. She was our favorite playmate, besides teaching us things. So, they were a very nice family. We were very fond of them.

Later on, when Bunny had children, after Emily was born--Bunny had Karen and then Emily--after Emily was born my mother decided that Bunny should have somebody to live in and to do the housework and help with the children. She wrote to Mrs. Flaherty and asked--Mr. Flaherty had died long before--would she come out and work for Bunny? So she worked for Bunny for quite a while when Bunny's children were little, so we had doses of Mrs. Flaherty.

Mrs. Flaherty was a character. She was Mrs. Malaprop when it came to language. Bunny had venetian blinds in her house and Flaherty called them "munition blinds." She got words mixed up. But Eleanor was well educated. And I didn't see any difference between Mrs. Flaherty, who was white, and George Timmony and his wife, who were black. They were just nice people who happened to work for us.

I didn't grow up with any racist feeling whatsoever. My parents didn't project that, and that was just--I didn't even know about it. I didn't know about anti-Semitism until I went to college in Chicago, the Chicago area, where people turned out to be very anti-Semitic. We had good Jewish friends in Des Moines and nobody thought much about it one way or the other. Although Edna Ferber wrote a biography in which she told about moving to Des Moines when she was a girl, and how anti-Semitic people were in Des Moines--well, she lived on the east side, you know, it was the other half of Des Moines. I'd expect it was quite different, different kind of people.

Riess: Edna Ferber was Jewish?

M. Foster: Yes, that's why she knew this. She'd felt it very strongly in Des Moines, which shocked me. I didn't realize that there was this feeling in Des Moines.

Riess: Your husband, George Foster, has said that when he was growing up life pretty much came to a halt on Sundays.

M. Foster: They were good Presbyterians.

Riess: For you, Sunday was just another day.

M. Foster: My schoolmates one time asked me, "What Sunday school do you go to?" I didn't live in the part of town that my classmates lived in, we went in a different direction from school, so I didn't play with them after school. So, they said, "What Sunday school do you go to?" I said, "I don't go to Sunday school." They said, "You don't go to Sunday school?!" And I said, "No." I went home and told my parents that they'd been shocked that I didn't go to Sunday school.

My parents said, "Well, you can go to Sunday school if you want to. Do you want to?" I thought about it, and I thought how I loved Sunday because Sunday was the day where I didn't have to go to school, I could just do what I wanted. We went to my grandmother's for dinner. My father worked in the garden--my father was home on Sundays. Sunday was a great day! So, "No, no thanks, I don't want to go to Sunday school!"

Growing Up, Summer Trips, Camping

Riess: From talking to you now, and from reading your sister's oral history, I get the impression that your parents viewed you as

being able to make your own decisions, without a lot of input from them.

M. Foster: I think there was plenty of input, but it was subtle input. They weren't saying, "Don't do this, don't do that." But we certainly were being brainwashed as we went along. In fact, we were never naughty. We literally were never naughty. I told this to a nursery school teacher in the progressive school my daughter Melissa went to when we lived in Washington and she was horrified! She said, "There's something wrong with children who aren't naughty!"

Well, we were somehow--our mother was a very quiet person. She never raised her voice. I don't remember her ever getting mad and shouting. Dad did, but she didn't. It was somehow as if she put us on a level of responsibility where we would be letting the whole thing down if we were naughty. But we did sometimes fight with each other.

Riess: What's an example of naughtiness, anyway?

M. Foster: Naughtiness at school was throwing spitballs at people. Little boys were naughty. Little girls weren't very naughty in my day in school. I think that behaving in responsible ways was sort of expected of us, so we fell into it. It didn't occur to us to rebel, or--Bunny did, Bunny would have fights with Dad. In fact, they would shout at each other and get in terrible arguments. I would go hide in the bathroom.

Riess: When she was a teenager?

M. Foster: No, all the way through. When she was little. She had a temper, she was stubborn. I was meek. I would fight with her sometimes, but I would never tangle with my dad. She was fearless. And, I just really would literally go and hide in the bathroom until it was over. I couldn't stand it.

Riess: Didn't you say that you were brought up as if you were twins?

M. Foster: Yes.

Riess: And yet you're very different personalities.

M. Foster: We were always terribly good friends, we were each other's best friend. Neither one of us ever had a "best friend." I think we were just each other's best friends. We didn't need best friends. Also, we lived in this sort of isolated neighborhood where all the children were younger than we were. So, we didn't have people our age except one girl, Joey, who was--I

was sixteen months younger than Bunny, and Joey was sixteen months younger than I. Joey was our playmate, the only kid in our neighborhood who was really our playmate in that sense. We did all sorts of things with Joey. Joey was a tomboy. She was more physically adventurous than either of us were, and that was a good influence.

Riess: When you say you were brought up as if you were twins, what does that mean?

M. Foster: We did everything together. We dressed alike [laughs]--but I always had to wear Bunny's dresses after she outgrew them, so I guess there were times where we weren't dressed alike. Every time we got new clothes, we had them alike.

We started school together. I was four, and she was just turning six. We started in September--her birthday was in September, so she was held back from starting school and I was pushed up. Our mother had taught us to read when I was three. She was really teaching Bunny, but I was there, so I just automatically learned too. I can't remember learning to read. I remember some things when I was two, but I don't remember learning to read.

I feel as if I have always been reading, because the minute I learned to read, we all--all four of us in our family --sat with books all the time. We couldn't wait to get home from school and pick up our book. We were just so "into" our reading.

Riess: What were you all reading?

M. Foster: My mother being a literary editor, the publishers sent her everything that came out, and we had all the children's books. Christmas was a great event because my mother would save up for each one of us the books that she thought we'd like the best--a stack of books each Christmas. And that was the most exciting thing about Christmas, because not only did I have a stack of books, but Bunny had a stack of books, and of course, we read each other's books. So, it was a real bonanza!

My favorite books were the Oz books and the Dr. Dolittle Books.⁵ I liked the *Five Little Peppers*.⁶ Melissa, my

⁵Hugh Lofting, *The Story of Doctor Dolittle*, Frederick A. Stokes Company, New York, 1920.

daughter, hated the *Five Little Peppers* because they were so good. I liked it because they were nice to each other. They were a family of children who were never mean to each other. Melissa liked books where children were not always nice to each other, she thought that was more realistic. She had different tastes than I did. Bunny and I both loved Louisa May Alcott, all her books.

Books we didn't have, my grandmother had--my grandmother had books left over from her children. So on Sundays, after dinner, Bunny and I would often go and read; if the little cousins weren't there, then we would curl up in the library behind a book. We'd borrow her books--we lived far from the public library, we never used the public library.

I don't remember that they told us to like certain books --we just did. I think they just came our way, and that's what we liked. I didn't like books that taught me things. There's one series about children in foreign countries--*Little Boy from Old Norway* or something like that--I didn't like them. I read them, but I didn't like them. I didn't like books that taught morals. If it was obvious that this was morality, it turned me against the book.

My father thought that our tastes were too shallow. We liked fiction. Although he read a certain amount of fiction, he mostly liked books that were instructive. He read aloud to us quite a lot, out of books that he thought were improving. He also read us Dickens, things that were funny. But the truth was, although I liked to be read to--when I was sick my mother would read to me--I really preferred reading to myself, than to be read to. I think I read faster than people can read aloud, for one thing. But, that was part of our life: he would decide to read certain books to us, and he would.

Riess: Were you taken to theater and music and so on?

M. Foster: Well, to the extent that there was this kind of thing in Des Moines, which wasn't much.

Riess: People didn't dash into Chicago?

M. Foster: No! Going to Chicago was a big event. Bunny got to go to Chicago first. And oh, I was so envious! So, then the next time a parent went to Chicago, I got to go along. I went with my mother, then I went again with my father. Mostly, I went

⁶Margaret Sidney, *Five Little Peppers and How They Grew*, 1880.

with my mother. When I went with my mother, we went to the theater.

She took me to see--one of my mother's closest friends was a novelist named Ruth Suckow, who was quite a famous Iowan novelist. Ruth used to visit us. Ruth loved books and she drew, she could draw wonderful pictures. She drew paper dolls for us, which we would cut out and color and play with. She also had some that she had watercolored that we'd cut out. We each had a big manila envelope labeled "Ruth Paper Dolls: Do Not Touch!" We were so afraid that our paper dolls would get thrown away; we loved Ruth's paper dolls. Ruth always talked about books with us. Ruth hated Pollyanna and she hated Elsie Dinsmore, so she drew those girls as looking ridiculous. She would ask us, "What are you reading now?" and we'd tell her, and then she'd draw those characters as paper dolls.

Riess: And about going to Chicago?

M. Foster: Yes. Ruth had a niece, I guess she was, who was the understudy to Jeanne Eagles in *Rain*.⁷ Now, *Rain* is not a play that you would probably take small children to, but I was taken to *Rain*. It was a play about adultery. And because Ruth's niece was the understudy we went behind the scenes afterwards and met the cast. So that was an exciting experience.

Certain kinds of things would come to Des Moines. Musical comedies--we went to some. And Madame Schumann-Heink came and sang in Des Moines. Madame Schumann-Heink had some connection with some relative of my father's, so he took us up to the stage afterward, and Madame Schumann-Heink gave me a rose and kissed Bunny. So, that was flirting with fame. Let's see, we saw some Gilbert & Sullivan.

Riess: Were your clothes bought for you each year in some ritual way?

M. Foster: Our clothes were bought seasonally. There were two department stores in Des Moines. We would be taken down to pick out clothes. When we were very little I don't remember doing that; I remember doing that later.

Riess: I wondered if you remembered shopping with your mother in a sort of girly way.

⁷John Colton [1889-1946] and Clemence Randolph, *Rain: A Play in Three Acts* (New York: Boni and Liveright, c1923). *Rain* was founded on W. Somerset Maugham's story, *Miss Thompson*.

- M. Foster: No, we weren't girly! My mother was a very practical woman. She dressed us in blue serge dresses, with stiff white collars and cuffs that would be washed and starched. We put on aprons when we came home from school, so that we wouldn't get our dresses dirty. I had nightmares about wearing my apron to school by mistake. It was about as bad as going naked.
- Riess: That's interesting. It doesn't quite fit the picture, does it?
- M. Foster: I don't know. It did to me! That's my mother's character. We also had Sunday dresses, our best dresses, which we would wear to Sunday dinner, or if we went to a party or something. And my uncle, who had gone to study in Italy--my painter uncle, Russell Cowles, won the Prix de Rome and so he lived in Italy for a while--he bought us Roman sashes that were multi-colored, and we wore those with our Sunday dresses which were also navy blue. We seemed to go in heavily for navy blue. Summer dresses, of course, were different. They were cotton dresses, and usually Bunny's was pink, and mine was blue; if there was any difference in them, it was color.
- Riess: No pants.
- M. Foster: No. Joey, our tomboy friend, wore overalls in the summer, but I don't think we did. We did, though, when we went on camping trips--we had khaki suits, pants and tops.
- Riess: Sort of a safari outfit.
- M. Foster: Sort of, but it was long before I'd ever heard of safaris!
- Riess: You went camping with your parents?
- M. Foster: Yes. Every summer. The summer that we went to Estes Park, I was seven. Then I had a mastoid operation when I was eight, and I was hospitalized and out of school for a while. That summer we went for a week or two to a resort in Minnesota called Breezy Point. It was a very popular summer resort place. We went up for a week or two weeks, but I was not allowed to get my head under water, I had to be very careful swimming.

The next summer, when I was nine, we went out to Wyoming, and we stayed in a dude ranch that belonged to old friends of my father's from his Wyoming days, and that was heaven. They had irrigation ditches that were deep, and we could swim. We learned to swim that summer when I was nine.

At the dude ranch we rode a horse named "Monkey"--we took turns riding the horse. We'd ridden horses at Estes Park too, when we were there, but this was very exciting to be in Wyoming. I went with my dad to Jenny Lake, all these places that have become so famous since. There was nobody on Jenny Lake. It's a beautiful, pure lake, and while he fished, I sat in the boat and looked at its beauty.

We camped the summer I was nine, ten, and eleven. The summer I was twelve, they started sending us to summer camp in New Hampshire.

Riess: When you went camping in Wyoming, did you always drive?

M. Foster: Yes, oh, yes! My father fitted the car out with all sorts of equipment for food and gear. Cars had running boards in those days, and he had boxes that fit on the running boards, and we had our camp routine where we helped Dad put up the tent, and Mumsie cooked. We got water out of the stream. You could camp everywhere in those days.

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M. Foster: Our preferred camping was along a stream, in the woods, or wherever you could stop. But campsites were beginning to come in, and also tourist cabins, the kind of thing that grew into motels ultimately. We only stopped there if our parents decided we needed to take a bath.

Becoming "Mickie"

Riess: How did your parents decide on that camp in New Hampshire for you?

M. Foster: Because some other older Des Moines girls had gone there. The directress of the camp was connected with Grinnell College in Iowa. So, there were people from Grinnell, and there were people from Des Moines, a few people. Most of the campers were from the East Coast. They sent us there because they thought that we should know other parts of the country.

Riess: Did you have any family back there?

M. Foster: No.

To get to camp was a long train ride, and that's where I got the nickname of "Mickie." Bunny and I--I was twelve--got on the train. It was in the evening, and we were going to sleep on the train to Chicago. The other girl that got on the train was sixteen. Her name was Helen Lovejoy, and she announced to us quite quickly that her nickname was "Buster." Bunny said her nickname was "Bunny," and I said, "I don't have a nickname."

The other girl said, "Oh, we'll have to give you a nickname." She said--"I was named Buster because of Buster Brown in the funny papers. We'll pick you a nickname out of the funny papers." So she picked--it wasn't a strip, it was a cartoon thing called *Toonerville Trolley*. The naughty boy in *Toonerville Trolley* was Mickey "Himself" McGuire--this was long before Mickey Mouse. She said, "Okay, we'll call you Mickey after, Mickey 'Himself' McGuire." Bunny decided I should spell it "Mickie."

That was exciting, to acquire a nickname. As we went across the country on the train--overnight to Chicago, and from Chicago through Ohio, through the states leading up to Boston--different girls would get on at different stops. We would introduce ourselves, and I was always introduced as "Mickie." By the time I got to camp, I was very firmly "Mickie"; at camp everybody called me "Mickie." Bunny did a little bit, but not so much--she still called me "Mary."

The next summer a good friend of ours from Des Moines went to camp too. She was halfway in age between Bunny and me. Her name was Peggy, and after she'd been at camp with us that summer--you know, in those days you went for two months--by the time we came back, Peggy was calling me "Mickie." And Bunny was calling me "Mickie." So then all my friends in high school began calling me "Mickie."

Riess: And your parents?

M. Foster: My parents never called me "Mickie." Or if they did--my father never did, my mother sometimes did, but she mostly called me "Mary." But Bunny called me "Mickie."

Riess: Were you ever homesick?

M. Foster: Never.

Riess: Camp was not a culture shock situation.

M. Foster: It might have been, but I had Bunny, you see. We lived in different tents, but we saw each other all the time. I don't remember ever being homesick.⁸

Riess: Did you write home to your parents?

M. Foster: Oh yes. We wrote constantly.

Riess: Was that a requirement of the camp? Or was that your instinct?

M. Foster: I don't really know. I think it was our instinct to want to share our experiences and know what was going on at home.

School Days

Riess: Putting the two of you into school the same year--why do you think your parents did that? What was the point?

M. Foster: Because we entertained each other. If they'd sent Bunny off to school, I wouldn't have had anybody to play with. It kept us out of my mother's hair, you see. She was busy. She was at her desk all day.

Riess: It was efficient.

M. Foster: It was an efficient move.

Riess: Did it say anything about your precociousness?

M. Foster: No, but when we got to kindergarten--we started kindergarten together when I was four, and she was five, turning six--the teacher found out that we could read. They quickly transferred Bunny into first grade. Bunny and I always made fun of the first grade primers because they were like "Dick and Jane"--they were so stupid. We were, of course, reading all the time, we were reading everything! Whatever came our way, we read [laughs]. The teachers couldn't believe this. Eventually they promoted me too. But Bunny was always ahead of me then.

⁸I loved camp. One part of being an anthropologist is that you go and live under awkward circumstances. A lot of people couldn't do that, so a lot of people wouldn't become anthropologists because they would have hated the whole idea of going off and living in a tent or a hut or wherever you'd end up. But I always like that, I always liked being outside. MF

I think we were half a year apart for quite a while. But after I had my mastoid operation I lost another half year, so I was a year behind her.

Riess: Were the schools good?

M. Foster: They had a very good reputation. The superintendent of schools, John Studebaker⁹ became the Secretary of Education under Roosevelt. I didn't think they were as good as most people did.

I had a teacher when I was first in high school, in the ninth grade, who taught American history. (The trouble with school was, you had to take American history over and over. And I hated history because it was all dates, and wars. So, it was an effort to have to memorize all this stuff.) But when I was in the ninth grade the history teacher, who was supposed to be one of the best teachers in Des Moines, had us make an outline of something about the American Revolution, I've forgotten what.

I got my paper back, and it said, "You don't know how to outline." Now, every time I ever have to outline anything, I think, "I don't know how to outline!" [laughs] A good teacher surely would have said, "Come and see me, and I'll help you learn how to outline!" But she didn't, and I was too bashful. I was terribly shy, I wouldn't go and talk to a teacher. So I didn't know what I'd done wrong, I just didn't know how to outline!

Was that good teaching? I thought it was terrible teaching!

Riess: Dreadful, unless she so inspired you to be the best outliner.

M. Foster: She didn't inspire me in the least. I didn't like her, I didn't like the class. And she was supposed to be one of the best teachers in Des Moines.

Riess: There were not private schools in Des Moines that were better?

M. Foster: There was a private school for small children that some of my friends went to. Peggy, who went to camp with us, had started there. It was kind of an upper crust school, some of the old, old residents, founding fathers of the city, sent their

⁹John W. Studebaker, Commissioner of Education, Department of the Interior in the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

children to that little school. It was never a consideration for us, so, no, we just automatically went to public school. I think the teachers were good.¹⁰ You know, that was the only profession that women could have! And smart women became teachers.

Riess: Maybe what that comment about your not knowing how to outline comes down to is--maybe it was one of the very few times when somebody told you that you were not terrific.

M. Foster: Oh, no. I knew I wasn't terrific. I never said anything, I didn't speak up in class. And my teachers would say to my mother, "Well, if she would ever recite, or ever hold up her hand, or ever talk--" I could read and write. Those were my two skills. I wasn't particularly good at arithmetic. I didn't like history, so I wasn't good at history. Geography--the teacher was awfully boring, and geography was nothing but what crops were grown, what kind of jobs people had. There wasn't any real social--I was always interested in social things. That's why I liked fiction--you learned how people interacted.

¹⁰Hearing about this little school later from my friends made me realize that it was much more experimental, it was more focused on the individual student's learning abilities and so on. I would have gotten more interested in subject matter, I'm sure, if I'd been going to Miss Nolen's, but I didn't and my parents never considered it.

Later I wondered if some of my mother's feelings about things didn't have to do with the fact that she'd had to switch when she was in high school from Algona to Des Moines, which was much bigger and different. Maybe it affected some of her thinking. I never asked her what kind of relationships she had in high school with her new classmates, but I think it might have had some effect on it. I thought she became sort of snobbish, in the sense that she really wanted us to associate with not wealthy people so much as just people who were socially prominent.

When they moved to Berkeley she was very pleased to be invited to join Town and Gown, for example. She cherished a lot of these social relationships. She also joined two clubs in San Francisco. I felt as if she had a snobbish streak that made her want to get into the top social level. She said she was just interested in how things worked, which she was, but I think there was more behind it, and I didn't think it would have come from her parents, so I thought maybe it came from moving to Des Moines and not being in the most desired social circle. That's just speculation.

MF

You see, I'm a social anthropologist. It wasn't until I studied anthropology that I thought, "This is what I like!"

Growing Up, With Books

Riess: Your sister has described your father's great curiosity and experimental bent.

M. Foster: He was very experimental.

She and I both felt critical of him because he didn't encourage us. He criticized us for not having hobbies, for reading all the time. But he didn't--he gardened, but he didn't give us seeds to plant our own garden. He didn't ever encourage us to be photographers. He kept his tools locked up, and we weren't encouraged to use his tools. Now Joey, our friend up the street, her father let her use his tools. She was a good carpenter. She grew up learning how to do all those things.

Riess: So, why?

M. Foster: I don't know. Because we weren't boys. My father--I don't think my father cared that we weren't boys. Our mother cared because I think she thought he would care. Boys were always highly valued in the Cowles family. And we were not boys.

Riess: I was wondering whether you were brought up like boys--in other words, as if you had that potential.

M. Foster: No, not at all. We were brought up as little girls.

My father would try to teach us to throw a ball properly, which we couldn't do. Girls' arms aren't built like boys' arms [laughs]. So he was scornful of us because we couldn't throw a ball. Bunny learned to whistle. I couldn't whistle, so he scorned me because I couldn't whistle. He teased us about our shortcomings a lot.

Riess: Were either of you favorites of his?

M. Foster: No. I think he was perfectly impartial. I don't think either of us were favorites of either of them. We were a pair. We were just a pair.

Riess: You've talked about big Sunday dinners at your grandmother's, and I wondered about the contrast with how it was during the week with just your parents and you girls.

M. Foster: We all read at the table.

Riess: You all read at the table?

M. Foster: Yes, we took our books to the table. And when Bunny got to be about thirteen, she came home and said to our mother that none of her friends read at the table--that we shouldn't read at the table. So, Mumsie laid down the law and said we couldn't read at the table anymore. She wouldn't let Dad read at the table, either. He'd sneak his book to the table and keep it on his lap and read it. But we were not allowed to read at the table because Bunny had said people shouldn't read at the table.

Riess: Well, that's a strange little story, isn't it.¹¹

M. Foster: I've always loved reading while I'm eating. That's the best time to read, really, when you're eating. You're satisfying two things at the same time, I think [laughs].

Riess: The experience on Sunday, a family together, arguing, eating, discussing, isn't that the ideal gathering of people?

M. Foster: Maybe from your standpoint. I liked it, it's what we did on Sunday. But I loved just sitting at the table, reading with my family. It isn't that we never said anything at the table, we did! We'd have conversations, we'd tell what we'd been doing. But we always had our book to fall back on.

Riess: Did your mother try to guide the conversation?

M. Foster: No. My parents didn't try to lead us into anything. We just grew up. My parents were not dedicated to educating us in any way. I think they just did what had been done to them in their childhood. Just grew up in a family, just did whatever.

Riess: Did your mother cook?

M. Foster: No. My mother hated to cook. My mother hated housework, so we always had a maid, who cooked for us. Thursday was the maid's

¹¹ Our sunroom was our dining room. The table had a paisley shawl over it in the daytime, and was covered with books and magazines. Then it was cleared for dinner. We always brought our ongoing book to dinner, whatever we were reading. MF

day off, Thursday afternoon; I guess that was standard, every maid had Thursday off. So we always had baked beans and Boston brown bread on Thursday because that could be made ahead and just left in the oven or heated, or something.

Riess: You just opened two cans, right?

M. Foster: Oh, no, no. Never opened cans. We always had maids who were good at bread. The Swedish woman who worked for us when I was very little was a wonderful baker. No, we had very good food. My mother, after all, wrote cookbooks [laughs].¹²

¹²I should say here that Mumsie was very interested in food and recipes. She loved planning meals for our maid to cook. She never went to the grocery--she didn't drive--and ordered everything over the phone. MF

II DES MOINES

[Interview 2: January 28, 2000] ##

Neighborhood Orientation

M. Foster: I have been thinking about the demographic development of the city of Des Moines. When my grandparents built their house, I think in 1910, they built on what probably at that time was just becoming the most desirable part of town, in other words, the area for upwardly mobile people who could afford it. Lots probably weren't particularly expensive, and my grandparents had a very large lot on 37th Street, which was on the south side of Grand Avenue.

Grand Avenue was the grand street that cut through from downtown out to where we lived. And the founder of the town, who was originally the very wealthiest citizen, built a huge house on the south side of Grand.¹ It was on a kind of a bluff overlooking the river valley down below. His house wasn't that far out from the downtown center, the lower-numbered streets.

My grandparents built on 37th Street, farther out, and their house I think was actually only one block from Grand Avenue, but it was a very long block because potential streets really weren't cut through in those days. The Wallace family, the parents of Henry Wallace, had a house right next door to theirs, and the man on the other side, quite a prominent citizen with a very large house, became a senator. Next to

¹ To get chronologically ahead, later on most of those big mansions that people had built got turned into funeral homes. I think this probably happened in a great many cities because as people moved out farther, these houses then got sold off so that they were not residential neighborhoods so much, although, of course, there were always some people. I think the founding father was named Hubble, and the Hubble house belongs to the city now. It's kind of a museum. MF

that was my Aunt Bertha Shore's house--my grandmother's sister. Her husband was an ear, nose, and throat doctor, who operated on me for mastoid. Then there was Greenwood School, where I went through grammar school.

Our house was on the corner of 34th Street and Lincoln Place Drive. Lincoln Place Drive was a very winding street that came up the hill from lower down, not clear down in the valley, but somewhat below, and it turned and came up, right at our house. It was very, very steep and very winding, and it was not really built on. I think it had a couple of older, less elegant houses down below, but the whole area where my parents built was on the upper slope of the hill. So we were really at the top of where 34th Street came in.

Beyond us there was a little stub of street that was paved, but it went into a dirt road, and the dirt road wandered again down into the valley which we called "the Hollow." The people who lived in the Hollow were not poverty-stricken, but quite poor. The railroad tracks went through, for one thing, so they were close to the railroad, and that was not prime quality residential property.

Riess: Were you permitted to go hang out in the Hollow?

M. Foster: Any place.

Riess: Did the children from the Hollow come to the school?

M. Foster: Yes. The children from the Hollow came to the school, but they were far enough from us, down below in the Hollow, that we had no interaction whatsoever with them, except at school. And Mrs. Flaherty, whom I've spoken of before, and her husband who took care of our furnace, had to come up this street, winding Lincoln Place Drive--they lived quite close to the railroad tracks down in the Hollow. We walked the railroad tracks--I don't think our parents knew how much we walked the railroad tracks.

Friends, Joey, and Halloween

Riess: When you say "we," it's always you and Florence.

M. Foster: And Joey probably, our playmate. And sometimes the little boys who lived close around. Next door to us was a family named Rawson, which was another old Des Moines family. The main

Rawson house was on Grand Avenue, as were most of the earlier, wealthy citizens' houses. This was, I suppose, the son of the original Rawson.

They had a son named Tom who was a teenager when I was a little girl, and I liked Tom a lot. In fact, Mrs. Flaherty and our current maid, I can't remember which one, used to tease me about his being my boyfriend, and I was probably three or four years old. Tom would ride me on the handlebars, or the bar, I guess, on his bike, and he was very nice to me, so I admired him quite a good deal.

Well, my main story about this neighborhood is that up the street, toward Grand Avenue, where 34th Street sort of ended, there was a street called John Lynd Road that ran underneath the end of 34th Street. There were some houses down there on John Lynd Road with some children that we interacted with. And right at the bridge, or viaduct end of this, there was a woman who used to do some catering. She would come when my parents had dinner parties, which was rare--a dinner party was a big event! Her name was Mrs. Fagen, and she had a son named George Fagen, who was a naughty boy, the same age as Tom Rawson.

So one time on Halloween--then kids didn't go "trick-or-treating" on Halloween; Halloween was a time when you played tricks. "Trick-or-treat" really was started by parents, I think, to keep the children from performing so many tricks.

Riess: You played tricks on your neighbors.

M. Foster: Yes, we went out in our neighborhood; we didn't go very far afield. When we were quite little, our father went with us, but he was very funny, and he played tricks on us while we were out there.

We would carry our pumpkin, our lit jack-o-lantern with us, and we would put it at people's doorsteps, and then we would ring the bell and run. We made tic-tacs out of used wooden spools that we made notches in, put a nail through the hole, and wrapped string around. We placed the spool up against the window, and pulled the string, so that the tic-tac made a rattling noise against the window [laughs].

We would sneak up on the house, and we would make this rattling noise at the window while one of us ran around to the door with the pumpkin with his jack-o-lantern face which our father always helped us carve--probably did most of the carving--so they were usually quite funny. My father liked to

do things like that, so he would go with us while we went scaring people.

For "tricks" children soaped windows, or car windows, but we were too nice, we didn't like to do that [laughs]. We liked to do surprise, sort of scary things, so they thought we were ghosts, or something like that. Sometimes, of course, we wore sheets, with holes in them for eyes, and when they opened the door we'd appear and they'd look at us and admire us. We used to go in a little group, which was Bunny and me, and usually Joey, accompanied by my father. We would just walk around the streets of the neighborhood. Halloween was a great occasion.

Well, on this Halloween that I'm getting to, that involved Tom Rawson and George Fagen, it was late at night, maybe midnight, I don't know. I was certainly safe in bed by that time. And suddenly, there was a crash!

Oh, and I should say that several years before that crash happened we'd had another crash. They'd started to build a house on the steep cliff that was just across the street from us. (It would have interfered with our view, so I'm sure my parents were not enthusiastic.) But these two things I'm thinking of happened fairly close together, as far as I can remember. The house--there had been this crash in the middle of the night, and my parents thought that a car had gone over the cliff because there wasn't much of an embankment. In fact, there probably was hardly any. There was this terrible crash, and my mother thought maybe some people had been killed. She got blankets and medical supplies, and my father went out to see what had happened, and the house had collapsed!

As you know, here in Berkeley people know how to build a house in a hilly place. But when we were building our house in Berkeley and George's parents came out and saw our lot, they told people that George and Mickie were building on a cliff! Our lot did fall off abruptly, but I didn't think much about it, my parents having built on this cliff! But, in the middle of the night, it turned out that this house across from them had just collapsed. It hadn't gotten very far--what was left was the debris, big pieces of concrete all down the hill.

But the crash on Halloween night--I don't really remember if I woke up, only that my parents were so concerned. And my father went out with a flashlight, and maybe some other men in the neighborhood did. It turned out that it was just a car, an empty car, that had gone over the cliff. When the police investigated, it turned out that Tom Rawson and George Fagen had let the brakes off a car that was parked up the hill from

us--34th Street toward Grand Avenue ran uphill, and there were some houses on the hill.

Anyway, these "naughty" boys that had released the brakes really got in trouble, and I expect the ringleader was George Fagen--because we all thought he was a naughty boy. He had such a nice mother, that was the strange thing about him--I don't know what had happened to the father, I don't remember a Mr. Fagen. George Fagen--I remember him walking down the street with his dog, and throwing matches under his dog's feet, so that they lighted on the pavement, and that made us so upset and so angry! Probably it didn't hurt the dog, but it seemed very cruel to us. However, George Fagen sometimes did come around and join us when we were doing various things, naughty or not.

Down the street from us, down 34th Street, past where it became a dirt road and began wandering into the Hollow, there had been an old coal mine, and there was a big pit. It was a shaft in the ground--I don't know if my parents knew that--it was really very dangerous. We were scared of the pit, not so much that it was deep and we might fall in, but that it was thought to be "bottomless," you know [laughs], and it vanished into the ground, and so it had a kind of a mysterious quality. I remember being down there with George Fagen, and a bunch of kids.

We were always a bunch--later on, the house that Tom Rawson lived in was sold to a doctor, what was then called a "baby doctor," nowadays called a pediatrician. His name was Fred Moore, and he lived next door to us. His son Fred was about a year younger than I. Betty Moore was about two years younger than I, so she was younger than Joey. So as far as girls in the neighborhood were concerned, there was Bunny who was the oldest, me next, then Joey, next Fred, and then Betty Moore. All roughly sixteen months apart--maybe Betty was a little younger.

Farther down where the viaduct crossed over and John Lynd Road went underneath, there were some houses that were more like the houses in the Hollow, old frame houses that were not particularly well kept up. And there were some houses that were newer, and there was a family named Hall who lived down there, and they had two children, Dan and Betty.

Dan was in my class in school, so he was my age. Poor Dan. I always used to think--"Oh, I'm so glad I'm a girl!" Because I cried, I was a crier, I burst into tears about things. Bunny never did, and I don't think Joey did. But Dan

did, and Dan was teased unmercifully by the children in my class in school as being a sissy. That was before anybody thought about homosexuality or gays. I have absolutely no idea what happened to Dan, but he liked to play with us. We didn't play with him an awful lot, but both he and Betty sometimes played with us. They played with Joey the most because Joey was up the street from us and closer to where they lived.

Before Joey's house, there was "Ding's lot,"² then there was an older frame house. An elderly couple lived there, but we didn't have very much contact with them because they were on the other side of Ding's lot. Next to them was a family whose name I remember sometimes, but I can't at this moment--they had two little boys and they kept goats. Joey's house was just beyond their house. That was on the left-hand side of this street.

On the right-hand side, going down toward the Hollow, but still on that upper level, there was a little neighborhood that had some nice houses, and people that we knew and played with. When we first started to school, when I was four and Bunny was five, Mrs. Flaherty was working for a family that lived down there named Bernard. They had a daughter Bernice--a year older than Bunny, so she was an "older girl" [laughs]--and Flaherty told us about Bernice Bernard when we started school, so every day on the way to school we would walk up the hill, turn right down at Bernice's street, and pick up Bernice.

Bernice had long curls that her mother curled around her finger every morning. Bunny and I had short bobbed hair with bangs, and Bunny's hair was nice and curly and she was admired for that. I was straight-haired, and only admired for my pink cheeks, or maybe my blue eyes. Bunny had green eyes, which were very unusual. But because I was very rosy, everybody always commented on my pink cheeks--that was my saving grace, I guess! Otherwise, I was a little silent unobtrusive child.

²There was a vacant lot next to us that belonged to J. Darling, the famous cartoonist who went by the name of "Ding," and we always called it "Ding's lot." He was a good friend of my father's. He worked for the newspaper too--in fact, I used to hang over his shoulder and watch him draw his cartoons, which just fascinated me, I loved the newspaper. In any event, my father used to plant vegetables on Ding's lot. We had a sandbox on Ding's lot. We had a swing on Ding's lot, on a big oak tree. Ding's lot was open territory for us. Much later, just before I was in college, my father bought the lot from Ding and enlarged our garden. MF

Riess: There's a cliffhanger quality to your story. You've introduced George Fagen, the bad boy, and the pit. Did anything happen?

M. Foster: No, I'm just talking about the hazards in our neighborhood, which were a part of our childhood. One of the hazards was the railroad. One of the hazards was this pit. Another hazard was the big drop-off in front of our house that had these great big concrete boulders on it.

Going down toward the Hollow, on the street that was paved but that didn't really continue through, there was a kind of an embankment that went off. At one point, Joey, Bunny, and I started digging a cave under this bank--you know, kids always want something to crawl into. We were busy digging this cave, and one night when Dad came home from work for dinner he said, "Are you girls digging under the bank?" Somebody had told him that some kids were digging a cave and it could collapse. We said, "Oh, yes, we're digging a cave." Perfectly innocently. And he said, "That's very dangerous." So we were forbidden to go on with our cave.

I'm getting ahead of myself, but later on we built another cave, not under the embankment, but just a hole in the ground kind of cave. We were always doing things like that, but we didn't do things that we knowingly thought were dangerous. I don't think my parents knew about the mine pit, or they would have said, "You can't go down there." I don't think they had ever walked down there.

Now beyond--the Rawsons sold their house to the Moores, and then on the other side of the Moores, a family named Kelly built a house. They had two boys, Bob and Peter. Bob was about the same age as Betty Hall, and Peter was littler. Then beyond the Kellys, it was woods, beautiful woods, and a little stream running through the woods, and lots of wild flowers in the spring. We loved going into the woods, so although there were dangers, from a child's point of view it was a great neighborhood to grow up in.

Some Observed Differences

M. Foster: What I'd really like to come to about my childhood was how many celebrations there were, things that were interesting for kids to work on and think about during the year. Every month had something special! Shall I talk about that, or shall I go on talking about caves we built? I can get from building caves

into building huts and all kinds of things--because we were always building.

Riess: Okay, caves first.

M. Foster: We were having a war with Fred Moore and the Kelly boys--they played together you see, they were the boys group, and we were the girls group. And this was because we were building a hut up in the lot just next to--on the edge of the pasture from--Joey's house.

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M. Foster: Joey's father, unlike my father, encouraged Joey to use his tools, and taught Joey how to do carpentry, how to do all kinds of what we considered boy things. And Joey was a tomboy, Joey was fearless, Joey would climb trees. I'd climb trees, but I was always scared, and I'd be timid--Joey would go fearlessly up the trees. These houses being built, Joey would walk the rafters and do other dangerous things, which Bunny and I never did. It was fun playing with Joey. I don't think she really endangered herself, she just knew how to do things. She didn't scorn us because we didn't. Also, she played quite a lot with Dan Hall, who probably was just as timid as we were.

Joey's father was a doctor. He was a doctor who treated hemorrhoids, "piles," and he ran ads. Dr. Moore, who lived next door to us, Fred Moore, was a doctor who didn't advertise --it was really taboo for doctors to run ads. Josiah Johnston, Joey's father, came from a little town in Iowa called Sigourney. Joey'd go to see her grandparents in Sigourney, and we'd ask, "What's Sigourney like?" And she'd say, "Sigourney is about the size of our yard!" [laughs] I pictured a miniature village built on Joey's lot.

Anyway, her father was kind of a country boy who'd gotten a medical degree, and he was very preoccupied with the fact that farmers had hemorrhoids so much, and his practice was mostly out-of-town country people. He'd put out pamphlets advertising himself, and Joey would have to work for her father folding the pamphlets, and we'd help her. So, I knew all of that. I knew the Johnstons' background.

Joey's mother, Myrtle, came from Davenport, Iowa, and her maiden name was Watrous. Joey's aunt, Aunt Nell, was quite a well-to-do woman who lived in Davenport. The Johnstons were interesting because the mother had come out of a little higher level of society than the father. They had two older children

who were just ready to graduate from high school when they moved to Des Moines.

We were awfully interested in the older children, June and Harlan--always called "Bud." The first jazz music I ever heard was records that Bud had. June and Bud were impressive older figures for us. June went off to college to Wellesley--and Bud went to Harvard. The father had a medical degree, obviously he had some college, but I don't think that Mrs. Johnston had.

The Johnstons' house was a square yellow brick house with a "porte-cochère." Nobody else had a porte-cochère, and I don't know why this house did--maybe it was built when there were horses. It was an older house, and the rooms were quite small. When I think about it--I get awfully interested in the construction of people's houses and how people lived. Joey and Becky shared a bedroom upstairs, and Dr. and Mrs. Johnston had a bedroom, and Bud and June each had a bedroom, so I guess there must have been four bedrooms. Becky was the baby.

Riess: Why do you think you were so interested in how people lived?

M. Foster: I guess I was interested in the fact that these lives that were intersecting with ours were really quite different.

Riess: You feel that it's an influence?

M. Foster: I think that I've always been interested in details, and I think that's why I became an anthropologist. I used to tell people that anthropology was the science of trivia, and that was why I got interested in it. If you're an anthropologist, trivia has meaning: you study the way people live and what people do. The trivial things they do are as important, or maybe more important, than the big things they do. Part of my background is noticing trivia.

Riess: When do you think you would have called it trivia?

M. Foster: Oh, not until much later. I think the first time I did was when I was teaching an adult level course at Fromm Institute at the University of San Francisco. I was trying to explain anthropology, and just as a joke I said that anthropology really is the study of trivia. And they all gasped! I really shocked them.

More on Mother's Writing

Riess: Was your mother interested in trivia?

M. Foster: Yes, women's trivia. She read every women's magazine: *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Pictorial Review*, *Redbook*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Delineator*. And she wrote syndicated poems about women's lives.

Pictorial Review and *Delineator* have long ceased, but they were big in my childhood. *Pictorial Review* had wonderful paper dolls, and I loved paper dolls, I collected paper dolls. *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Pictorial Review* had pictures of stylish ladies in dresses, and sometimes children in their clothes, and I would cut those out. I had a shoe box full of paper dolls, and I played paper dolls by myself a great deal. Bunny wasn't as interested in paper dolls as I was. I had a box labeled "Mary's Paper Dolls, Do Not Touch!" Like the paper dolls that Ruth Suckow made for us.

Riess: Would your mother play with you?

M. Foster: No. But my mother was very willing to interrupt what she was doing and talk to us, she wouldn't chase us away.

We would come up and stand beside her desk chair and say, "We don't have anything to do, what can we do now?" She'd look pensive and wonder what to suggest, and we'd say, "What did you do when you were a little girl?" And then she would tell us about growing up in Algona, and about her pony, named Cappy. She was born into the horse era, everybody had horses and carriages, and as the first-born kid in her family she had this pony and a little cart.

Of course we were as envious as could be. I always wanted to have a pony. We used to enter contests to win a pony.

Riess: Why couldn't your parents get you a pony?

M. Foster: Nobody in our neighborhood had ponies [laughs]. I think keeping a pony would have been difficult! You'd have to build a barn. I don't remember that we ever suggested they buy us a pony. We weren't that forward.

Riess: Your mother read all those magazines? I had had a more kind of sophisticated view of your mother's tastes.

M. Foster: My mother was a popular writer, she wrote these poems under the name of Martha Hart.³

A cousin in Des Moines, Tom Hutchison (grandson of one of my grandmother's sisters, Aunt Edie Call who lived in Algona and married a man named Hutchison), sent me, about two days ago, a sheaf of xeroxed clippings, because a first cousin of mine, Morley, had come to visit him, and Tom and Morley and Morley's mother had been going through some old family papers and come across these family clippings.

He sent them to me because there was a clipping with a picture of my mother when she had won first prize in a poetry contest of Iowa poets. It was a long clipping about Helen LeCron, with the winning poem. I hadn't seen the poem before, so I was thrilled to receive this from Tom. The other clippings were about relatives visiting, so-and-so travelling here and there, the kind of thing that appeared in small town newspapers--they were all from the Algona papers.

My mother's parents moved to Des Moines in the early 1900s. They came to Des Moines when my mother was just finishing high school, I think--I can't remember whether she graduated from high school in Algona or Des Moines. In Des Moines they lived on the other side of Grand Avenue someplace--they rented a house. Then when she went off to Northwestern to college they built the large house that I knew as "Grandma's house" and that Mumsie referred to as "over home."

I think that it was after she married that she began writing poetry, in order to earn money. Like my dad, she was an English major who loved literature, but she liked women's writings the best. Her favorite authoress was Sigrid Undset. She read and re-read these series. There were two series by Sigrid Undset that she adored. She also read and loved Jane Austen. She was terribly interested in the Bloomsbury group--Virginia Woolf and so on--she followed the whole history of the Bloomsbury group.

That was the kind of writing that she liked, writing about people's daily lives and how people interacted. So that side of me I certainly got from my mother, the "trivia" side--and perhaps even the anthropological side. I think my father was really more highbrow than my mother, if highbrow means

³She would have been glad that you thought she had more "sophisticated" tastes. But what does sophisticated mean? Highbrow? Elite? MF

being interested in world affairs or wider pictures of things. He and my grandfather discussed politics all the time, so we heard about famous trials, and about William Jennings Bryan and other prominent figures.

We'd be on the floor playing paper dolls, or something, while these men were talking. Also at Grandma Cowles' house, at the Sunday dinner table, the men had these fascinating conversations about national or international world affairs, everything that was going on. But I don't know that I was terribly interested.

Riess: Would you say, looking back, that you thought then that men made the world go around?

M. Foster: Yes, of course. Women--at my grandmother's house the aunts and my mother would always be talking about their household things and their children. Or gossiping about their friends. And while that was interesting in a way, I always wanted to hear what the men had to say.

Word Games, Puzzles, Language

M. Foster: The men also played games--they used to invent games like competitively throwing things into wastebaskets, or throwing things different places--and I wanted to join in the games. And my grandmother and my father played anagrams, and that was what I envied the most because I wanted to play anagrams with them. They had a *mano a mano* sort of approach to anagrams [laughs], and they were both expert anagram players. When Leslie, my father's brother, visited us, he would play anagrams with them, and I think Bertha sometimes played anagrams. If there was an anagram game going, I always hung over that.

Now this is getting to my influences. Obviously I'm a linguist, and words were important. Bunny and I learned to read, as you know, very young. We discussed these things with each other a great deal, about how words that had "e's" in them should be pronounced differently. We decided that horse should be pronounced, "hors-ee." Anything with an "e" like horse--rose should be "ros-ee." I don't know how long this lasted, but I remember it very well, and I was probably four years old. We were critical of people because they weren't pronouncing things the way they "should" be pronounced.

Riess: So you made your own language.

M. Foster: We thought everybody was incorrect, and that we should improve them.

Riess: Were the anagrams printed in the newspaper?

M. Foster: Oh, no, no. There wasn't that kind of thing in the newspaper in those days.

Anagrams were letters, individual letters--you can still buy anagrams, but most people don't know how to play. You start by putting out a certain number of letters. Then the first person tries to make a word with them, and if nobody can make a word they put out another letter, and another letter--in the game that they played, but there are different kinds of anagram games. The kind that I now play when we go up to our place in the country with Dan Slobin--he's a psycholinguist like Melissa, a close friend of Melissa's, and he teaches at Berkeley in the psychology department. Dan always played anagrams with his father. He comes up and we play his father's kind of anagrams, which is much faster-moving than the old-fashioned anagrams, where you used to sit and think for a long time.

Riess: Were you--are you very competitive?

M. Foster: I suppose in a certain way. I suppose I always wanted to win at games, and I still do like to win, if I'm going to play. What's the point in playing if you're not playing to win?

I don't think I'm very competitive. People might disagree. I think if I were competitive, I would have moved farther along in my field [laughs]. Competitive people quickly publish things and get out there, so that they can get better jobs and do this and that. That wouldn't have been my style ever. Being competitive in games, I think, is not necessarily the same.

Riess: You said when we parted after the first interview that you couldn't wait to get down to your study where your work [on global language reconstruction] was. You described it as completely satisfying, and a bit like a game.

M. Foster: It's the world's biggest puzzle, and I love puzzles. And there's always another piece of the puzzle. It's endless. If you know how many words there are in anybody's vocabulary, and you're trying to reconstruct all of those back to a common ancestor globally, that would be the end of the puzzle.

I'm trying to get to a point where it's possible to frame it in such a way that you can discuss it, or explain it to people, so that they understand what you're doing. A lot of it stays in your head: you haven't really thought of ways to make it comprehensible to anybody else, even to other linguists who are antagonistic to the whole idea. They don't think it can be done.

And if people have it firmly in their minds that something can't be done, that you can't reconstruct language back to its early roots, then why would you start trying? Especially since you're letting yourself in for a lifetime of labor and still haven't finished the puzzle.

Riess: When did you begin the puzzle downstairs?

M. Foster: It goes back to my graduate experience in linguistics, when I learned about the comparative method--I thought the comparative method was extraordinary. All of my linguistic reconstruction is using the comparative method, and that is very respectable linguistically, except that linguists think you can't reconstruct by means of the comparative method any earlier than the beginnings of Indo-European languages.

Riess: Okay, and that's a footnote on your work.

M. Foster: Everything I say builds into that in some way.

Riess: You have made a good case for studying trivia, but you also made a good case for an interest in words.

M. Foster: Word trivia is just as important as any other trivia. And the fact that Bunny and I thought about phonetics that early, I think is quite interesting. I cannot divide what I thought from what Bunny thought because we always talked about these things together. I, of course, went on doing something about language. Bunny always read a great deal. Like my mother, she read the bestsellers, which I don't do as much.

World War I, A Background Memory

Riess: Mickie, earlier you were telling me a story about another cave.

M. Foster: Yes, I was starting to tell how we were building a hut out of some packing boxes that we got from Joey's father. We built shelves in them so that somebody could have a downstairs room

made of the lower floor with a shelf, and the next person would have a shelf up above--I had a second story shelf--and we kept some treasures there.

We were building our hut, and these naughty boys who liked to tease us started stealing our lumber, so we were at war. We were very angry at these boys, we wanted them to stop interfering with us. We took pieces of our lumber and we marched, being like soldiers, down the street, past the houses, down to where we were building the cave--we also were working with the boys on the cave, so we had a kind of joint thing going on there--because we were going to attack the boys.

Mrs. Kelly saw us going past their house and she called my mother and said, "The girls have boards with nails in them and they are going down to threaten the little children!" I'm sure we would have done nothing of the kind, but we armed ourselves in order to look fierce. So we got in trouble, and they made us stop building the cave. Or maybe we stopped because of this incident.

Riess: The imagery of war, do you think World War I influenced you?

M. Foster: Oh, of course. I can tell you my experiences with World War I, in fact I'd like to. I don't know where to put it in.

Riess: Well, I think right now.

M. Foster: Certainly we were very much caught up in the war. I was born in 1914, and the war ended in 1918. And our house was built when I was three. The war was going on in Europe, and so there were all sorts of things involved--I don't remember whether I said that my father used to have me say "Constantinople."

Riess: No.

M. Foster: I was a precocious talker, and I could pronounce things, I was noted for not ever having talked baby talk. Besides my red cheeks, that was my other claim to fame [laughs]. My father would show me off to his friends by having me say "Constantinople," which I could pronounce correctly when I was two. And of course that was when Constantinople was in the news.

My parents had friends who were not born in Germany, but their parents were born in Germany, so they had this German background. Their name was Newman. They had a little girl named Elsa-Margaret, about a year younger than I--I was about two-and-a-half, Elsa-Margaret was a toddler. Elsa-Margaret's

parents had taught her how to goose-step like German soldiers, so that she could pick her legs up straight, and it was very cute.

Riess: But that was odd that they had done that.

M. Foster: No, because--people were very aware of Germany. Americans knew about the war, and knew about the German soldiers, and knew that that's the way the German soldiers marched.

Riess: True, but most Germans were trying to disappear.

M. Foster: Only later. Only after we got into the war. That's why I make this distinction--it was earlier. Later on I think they probably wouldn't have done that because it would have called attention to the fact that they were of German background. But at the time, it was perfectly respectable.

My other experience was after we got into the war. Soldiers were being trained at Fort Des Moines, a training place on the north side of town, and I don't know how my parents got so well-acquainted with this young soldier--his name was Stanton Dogie--but he came to our house a great deal, and he was terribly nice to me. I would sit on Stanton Dogie's lap, looking at his buttons, which said U.S. I was learning to read, and I asked, "What does U.S. stand for?" And he said, "It stands for 'us'! But it also stands for the United States." That impressed me a great deal.

Stanton Dogie also used to pick me up and put me on the mantle. When the house was being built my father built this great big stone fireplace. It was at the side of the living room, right opposite the front door. We had no front hall, we just came in the door into the living room, right opposite the fireplace. He built this very carefully--I think he had a couple of friends who helped him. He had two very close college friends who used to visit us a great deal and had an influence on me too. These were adults in my life that were important.

Then Leslie, my father's brother--I guess he enlisted, and he was being trained, so he was in uniform. I remember Stanton Dogie and Leslie were the two soldiers. But the war ended--just about when Leslie was hoping to be sent overseas, suddenly the war ended. I don't know what happened to Stanton Dogie.

Riess: The war isn't a terrible memory.

M. Foster: Well, in the sense that there were horror stories about German atrocities that I heard.

Riess: You were rewarded for your precociousness. Is this one way you were not interchangeable with Bunny?

M. Foster: No, I think we were interchangeable. Although she was a little older when she learned to read. But because I was so little and I could--I was not only precocious as a reading person, but I was small for my age. I suppose that made it more impressive to have me say "Constantinople" than have Bunny say "Constantinople." Whether Bunny used baby talk or not when she was a baby, I don't know.

Bunny was very slow in learning to walk. Bunny fell when she first got on her feet at fourteen or fifteen months and didn't walk again until she was eighteen months old, which meant that I was two months old by the time Bunny learned to walk. They lived in Cheyenne then, and she was on the porch learning to walk. That story was told to me when I was very young because I always said that I remembered that episode, and people always said, "You can't remember that, you weren't born yet!" [laughs] We were physically timid children. I managed to--well, of course I had the example of Bunny walking, so I probably walked earlier.⁴

More on Family and Publishing

Riess: Before we started recording we were talking about *The New Yorker* and other magazines the family generally read.

M. Foster: There were two humor magazines, one was *Life* and one was *Judge*. They were almost duplicates of each other, *Life* and *Judge*. I think *Life* lasted longer--and also later started over as a photographic journal. Then, of course, there was *Look*, which was started by my Uncle Mike, my mother's youngest brother, Gardner Cowles, Jr., called Mike. He moved to New York and he started *Look*.

My mother's two youngest brothers, John and Mike, were the last two of the six children in the family. My Uncle Russell, who was a year younger than my mother, became a

⁴Suzanne, It seems to be that you keep trying to demonstrate a rivalry between Bunny and me that didn't exist. MF

painter--I guess I said that. My grandfather really wanted him to go into the newspaper. He didn't think that being an artist was the right thing to do, until Russell won the Prix de Rome. Even then, my grandfather was still trying to get him to come in the newspaper.

He had Russell paint some murals for the inside of the Register and Tribune Building, which was in the center of downtown Des Moines on Locust St. He also had Russell trying to work for the paper for a while, but Russell rebelled. John and Mike did exactly what Grandpa did. They followed in Grandpa's footsteps, absolutely lock step and perfectly, and they were both brilliant newspapermen.

John went off to Minneapolis and bought the *Minneapolis Star*. I can't think whether it was the *Star-Tribune*--I think it was two papers--just the way the *Des Moines Register* absorbed the papers in Des Moines. But anyway, John and his family moved to Minneapolis, and they've always been the Minneapolis branch of the Cowles family. Mike was in Des Moines until he decided to start *Look*.

Riess: Their father financed them?

M. Foster: Oh, no, they had important jobs at the *Register and Tribune*, they were financially independent certainly.

Our grandfather, though, did give newspaper stock to all of us, including some of the grandchildren. Bunny and I certainly were part of the package, but I think maybe all the grandchildren--it would depend on their ages because some of Mike's children were much younger, but obviously they got stock from Mike. So we all had stock in the papers.

I didn't think much about it until recently when the paper was sold. We had gotten dividends from the stock, but they weren't all that big. However, when the newspaper was sold to Gannett it went out of the family, so then all of the money that was in it from the family got realized. Unlike George, who grew up in a pretty well-to-do background, mine was not. My father and mother worked for the paper, but they didn't make much money. My father paid a lot of attention to whether we turned out the lights!

Self-Confidence

Riess: Your school years in Des Moines--did you have special teachers who were very important? Influential women teachers perhaps?

M. Foster: I think it interested me then, and I think still interests me, that the teachers were unmarried ladies. I think if they got married, they stopped teaching. Mostly they didn't get married. They stayed home and took care of their elderly mothers. The English teacher, Miss Blackman, who I suppose had the most influence on me, did stay home and take care of her elderly mother. I can't say as I felt really close to any of the teachers, but I suppose they did have an influence of some kind.

Riess: It all sounds like a normal childhood.

M. Foster: People were free! People weren't protected the way they are now. People are afraid to let their children go out and just play.

Also, we didn't have any homework. The Superintendent of Schools, who became the Secretary of Education under Roosevelt, didn't believe in homework. Even in high school we weren't supposed really to have homework that we couldn't do in a study period. And we were not programmed with all kinds of lessons. We did take music lessons, and once a week the piano teacher came to our house. Some children took dancing lessons--and I was always sorry I wasn't one of them. But one thing about my mother, she didn't like to have us show off. And when our music teacher had recitals, she didn't like it very well, but we did play in the recitals.

Riess: Why did she not like it?

M. Foster: She just didn't want her children to show off. She'd have done much better with us if she'd let us show off a little bit.⁵ It made us too shy. We never were thrust out into the world where

⁵Self-confidence is promoted by fostering self-assurance through encouraging performance as good rather than bad--we were made to think it was showing off. There are dangers and advantages of "limelight," and it is interesting to me to think about the fact that my mother wrote her book with someone else, and that I have also written with someone, Robert Rubinstein, Lucy Botscharow, Stanley Brandes. Sharing the limelight rather than having it makes it easier to bear--obviously it is a problem for me, how to be an "authority." MF

we had to do something. I was really sorry not to take dancing because I think I would have been physically more adept.

Riess: This shyness--when did it begin to dissipate?

M. Foster: It's still with me very much. I struggle!

Riess: What does shyness have to do with self-confidence? Are they different?

M. Foster: Well, if you're very self-confident, then you feel that it's just as important for you to speak up as for anybody else. You don't have to be blatant about it, but at least you're not scared.

Riess: Have you been hampered by your shyness?

M. Foster: Oh, very, very hampered, I think we both were. But Bunny got into all these civic roles and so on because she had ideas about starting things--she never got into anything until she started it. After she'd started a bunch of things, she was invited to be on boards. She was on countless boards. She got to be a mover and shaker in Oakland. But she didn't do that early.

Organizations, Clubs

M. Foster: My view of town was living up above the railroad. I remember when the Shriners had a convention in Des Moines, and the Shriners's train came through. Shriners wore funny hats, and they had noisemakers--I could see the trains and all these Shriners going past [laughs].

My father belonged to the Lions Club, and he loved the Lions Club. My mother belonged to the Press and Authors Club. My grandmother belonged to the Women's Club--I can't remember whether my mother belonged to the Women's Club. If she did, she wasn't a very active member. My mother belonged to something called the Proteus Club, and that still goes on.

Riess: Now what does that mean?

M. Foster: It's kind of an interesting club. They work up subjects and give papers and talk to each other. It's a semi-intellectual organization--sort of like the Society of Women Geographers which I belong to and in fact was instrumental in starting

here--because the members give talks. But the thing about the Woman Geographers is that these women that belong to the Woman Geographers are all actively doing something that has some geographical focus--some part of the world--so the talks are terribly interesting because they are very different topics, but always geographically oriented somehow. The Proteus Club is sort of like that, in that the people used what they knew or what they got interested in, to give their talks, but it was not as intellectual.

My mother and her secretary wrote a book together. My mother wrote all kinds of books, usually with somebody, like her cookbooks that were with her nutritionist friend. But her secretary was a very bright woman that she talked to a great deal, and I guess belonged to some women's organizations. So they decided to write a book called, *How to be a Clubwoman*.

Bunny, come to think about it, seemed to follow in this path, because Bunny, having organized a lot of things and being on a lot of boards of things she organized, got invited to be on boards. Then she began being the authority on how to run boards. The paying job that she finally had in San Francisco was about boards--consulting for boards. So that was sort of like my mother writing *How to be a Clubwoman*.

My grandmother belonged to the D.A.R. and the Colonial Dames. Colonial Dames is more exclusive than the D.A.R. And my grandmother resigned from the D.A.R. when they wouldn't let Marian Anderson sing. George's mother and father were involved in that too, which is interesting.

A Year of Rituals and Celebrations

Riess: A theme we need to return to: you said that in your childhood the year was marked by the celebrations.

M. Foster: Yes, I can go through the whole thing because it was so interesting. I could start with New Year's, but New Year's wasn't all that important in my childhood because I couldn't stay up. You'd hear the whistles blowing all over town--and so it was exciting. After January, then my birthday is the first of February. Our birthdays were celebrated in a way that I don't really approve of: on Bunny's birthday I was given gifts, as well as Bunny, and Bunny on mine. Bunny got slightly more gifts or something more special if it was her birthday, but I was always included.

There were two things connected with my birthday that were thrilling. The most thrilling was that the Tony Sarg marionettes came to Des Moines every February, and we were always taken as a birthday treat to the Tony Sarg marionettes. I adored them, and I have adored puppets ever since. So that was an interesting influence. A lot of cultures throughout the world are interested in hand puppets, so I've collected puppets in places we've gone to--not as a collection exactly, but just certain puppets that have appealed to me.

So, that was the big event for my birthday, though not necessarily on the day of my birthday. We did have birthday parties where the birthday girl was celebrated, of course. And we were always given books. Any holiday that had to do with gifts, we were always given books. Of course, by the time my birthday came along we were through reading our Christmas books, even though a huge pile of Christmas books came to each of us, I'd say maybe ten or twelve books apiece!

February, for Valentine's Day we got Valentine boxes, and why they don't make these any more, I don't know. They had all the makings for Valentines, but you put it together the way you wanted to. They had lace paper to put on the front, and they had little tabs that you folded and stuck so that the lace paper would be above--sort of framing the picture. Every class had a Valentine box that was decorated by the class, and we made the Valentines and gave Valentines to all of our classmates. I suppose not everybody gave to everybody, but we certainly did. So we had to make a lot of Valentines and so Valentine's Day was terribly important.

March was my mother's birthday. She was born on St. Patrick's Day. And we always celebrated St. Patrick's Day--we always tried to wear something green. That I guess was the most important event in March.

April, of course, was April Fool's Day. We'd spend a lot of time thinking up jokes to play on people--tricks, things to say to people to make them believe something. That was tremendous fun. If anybody forgot it was April Fool's Day--they were very gullible.

May. May Day was the big thing. Making May baskets is something that is completely gone, I'm afraid. I hope there are some rural areas where they still make May baskets. We worked very hard making May baskets. That was where Mumsie was useful because she knew how to fold paper in certain ways to make really good May baskets. So we would decorate our paper May baskets, and then we would go to the woods, and by the

first of May everything was in bloom, and we would pick masses of wild flowers, and fill our baskets, and take them around the neighborhood. This was another occasion like Halloween where you went to all the houses. You put your May basket on the front steps of the front porch, rang the doorbell and ran and hid.

Riess: Did people know who left the basket? Did you want them to know?

M. Foster: I think we kind of would appear, yes--yes, I guess we wanted credit.

Riess: And would only girls do it?

M. Foster: I think it was mostly girls.

June, school let out, and that was the big day of the year, when school was over! Oh, it was so exciting! The whole marvelous summer ahead, and of course in the summer we went on camping trips, then we went to camp. Summer was glorious. The camping trips that we took were always a real treat. We had little dolls that we'd made clothes for; we each had a shoe box with a little doll that we'd made camping clothes for that were like our camping clothes. We worked quite hard before summer getting ready for our camping trip with our little dolls.

Eleanor Flaherty taught us to sew--oh, we weren't terribly good, we'd just cut out the shape of a dress and sew it up the sides. A family, the Copes, that were friends with my parents, had three daughters, Elva, Alice, and Ethel Mary, and Elva was the oldest and she was in her teens, and she made the most beautiful tailored doll clothes. I never could aspire to anything like Elva's doll clothes. It was very creative.

Riess: Did you have a homemaking or home economics class in school?

M. Foster: Yes, we had one class in sewing one year, and a class in cooking another year, I guess. Sewing class, you had to use a thimble. And I can remember, the first thing you made was a potholder. Then it seems to me we made something like an apron. But you had to wear a thimble. I always took off my thimble, I couldn't sew with a thimble, and the teacher would always catch me without my thimble, and reprimand me.

Riess: So you set off for your camping trip with dolls.

M. Foster: We sat in the back of the car and played with our dolls. But we also played that we were the Duchess and the Baroness. We

had this imaginary world where Bunny was the Baroness, and I was the Duchess, and we each had a husband who were the Baron and the Duke. Her husband was named George. My husband was named Bob. And we talked in British accents--very stilted, you know, our idea of how British people talked.

Riess: And how did you know how British people talked?

M. Foster: I don't know! [laughs]

Riess: Radio?

M. Foster: I don't know--because radio didn't come along until I was in high school. My father built a radio--another story, because he built it so that it didn't play unless it could be attached to the battery of the car, which was in the garage underneath the house. All of my high school friends, when I was in the ninth grade, would talk about these radio programs, which I couldn't listen to because they weren't on when my father was at home [laughs].

July, 4th of July, we were each given a bag of fireworks. Not skyrockets and things like that, but firecrackers and snakes--"snakes in the grass" they were called. And we were given punk: you'd light your punk in the morning, and then you lit your firecrackers from your punk so you didn't have to light matches.

In the morning when you woke up, the boys in the neighborhood were already setting off their firecrackers, so you woke up to the sound of firecrackers, and the firecrackers went on all day. And you kind of nursed your firecrackers along. You had a big bag full of firecrackers and fire things --different kinds of things. So we spent the day--and we'd put firecrackers under tin cans and shoot them up in the air. Then in the evening, Dad would set off skyrockets and Roman candles, things like that. Sparklers of course, we adored sparklers.

August was my father's birthday. August, of course, school was about to start, we were just coming home from our camping trip or something like that. I can't think of any holiday in August.

Riess: Did you celebrate mother's day and father's day?

M. Foster: No. My mother never wanted to have presents on mother's day. There wasn't a father's day. That was added later. Mother's day, I'm not even sure was there in my early childhood.

Let's see September, Bunny's birthday. October, of course then we get to Halloween which I've already talked about. And Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving was always at my grandmother's house. We used to weigh ourselves before and after [laughs]. All the cousins--our grandparents had one of those big scales.

III FINDING THE THEMES

[Interview 3: February 2, 2000] ##

M. Foster: I've read three oral histories from the Bancroft: one was my sister's, one was George's,¹ and one is Krakie's [Theodora Kroeber],² which I have not quite finished. And I wonder to what extent chronology is the guiding principle in doing oral history.

Riess: To a great extent.

M. Foster: Because I found that Krakie, along toward about the middle of hers, began getting off from the chronology into topics. I think that topics suit me better than chronology. She free-associated a lot, and so do I. So I have a hard time over my childhood: if I'm just talking about my childhood, I pick up one thing and then another.

Chronologically I go across a whole sweep of things, but I don't focus the same way I would if I were thinking about things from the standpoint of language, for example, or linguistic analysis, or social analysis--if I'm talking more broadly within anthropology, that would be the way I would go about it.

George is different because he's very chronologically oriented. He knows absolute dates and also he has kept a line-a-day diary down the years.

¹George M. Foster, *An Anthropologist's Life in the 20th Century: Theory and Practice at UC Berkeley, the Smithsonian, in Mexico, and with the World Health Organization*, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, 2000.

²Theodora Kroeber-Quinn, *Timeless Woman, Writer and Interpreter of the California Indian World*, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1982.

Riess: Well, what do you think we've done so far? Are you frustrated about what we have been doing?

M. Foster: I think it makes me wander more. It makes me get on different tracks and then it makes me think of other things. My sister--the chronology of what she did was extremely important. But my work has not been chronological in that sense. My present work is prehistorical, but it isn't attached to dates.

George just naturally attaches himself to dates, he always has. If I ask, "What were we doing on January 1st, 1942?" either he knows, or he thinks about it and he can pull it out, which I couldn't possibly. I don't think in terms of dates at all. I think in terms of how old my children were when we did such and such. I can figure back to when they were born--I say, "That must have been when Melissa was seven--."

Riess: You have such a sense of place, intersections of streets. I imagined your mind recreating the "village" in which you lived.

M. Foster: It wasn't a village, it was a neighborhood in the city. But it was limited. That's an interesting thing to me about my childhood: I was very limited in my early childhood, hardly out of my neighborhood. And then little by little my life began moving along--I went to camp in New Hampshire and made friends that were different from my friends at home.

I was shy, so I didn't mix a lot with even the kids in my class at school, because they went in a different direction when they went home. I didn't see them outside of school. My mother didn't push me out into doing things, taking dancing lessons for example, which some of the children were doing. And it would have been good for me if I had. [tape interruption]

Illness, Death, and Taboo Subjects

Riess: We've just reviewed, off-tape, the themes you have suggested. Life cycles was the first.

M. Foster: Life cycle is an important theme in anthropology, social anthropology. And I got thinking about my life in terms of what things happened to me that got me concerned with problems of life and death and illness--health in general.

I talked about Flaherty, who did our laundry and worked for us and did other things, like--this is something that my mother never liked me to say, that Flaherty would come give us our weekly bath. I'd say we had baths once a week, and my mother would say, "You did not!" Because later on, bathing daily got to be such an important thing for people that they really thought it was lower class or something if you didn't bathe constantly.

I've interviewed George about that, and he had exactly the same experience that I did--that he was bathed weekly and that his ankles were black by the time he got in the tub. My sister and I were bathed once a week, and we were bathed together, foot-to-foot, one at each end of the bath tub, and I have a perfect mental image of the way we looked--the way it looked to me--sitting with Mrs. Flaherty at the side of the bath tub kneeling beside us and washing us. I think this is funny because my mother was so opposed to my even thinking that. Yet here it was a very vivid memory. I don't know that I ever discussed it with Bunny.

I'm going back to Flaherty because of the death theme--when I first became aware that people die. I talked about Bernice Bernard because we picked her up on the way to school. I don't know how long the family lived there, it seemed to me it was quite a while, but I think it can't have been because then they moved to some other part of town. In any event, Flaherty kept in touch with them, or kept knowing about them, so she told us about Bernice's death.

Bernice died of typhoid fever. My father had had typhoid fever as a child, and had told us about how ill he'd been, and how it took him quite a while to recover, and so on. So I knew this was a very serious illness. Well, Bernice died.

And Bernice had a big doll, a really big doll. Maybe I mentioned that before? Because that is where I got the idea of wanting a big doll. Bernice had a doll like a two-year-old child, let's say. And she had a baby doll too. When I would go to Bernice's house, on the way home from school, I would get to play a little bit with these dolls.

Well, Flaherty told about Bernice's burial, and the fact that Bernice's big doll was buried with her. And although I was affected to some extent, I guess, by the fact Bernice was buried, what really concerned me was that the doll was buried. Bernice was dead, Bernice had to be disposed of and put under the ground, but the doll didn't, the doll was not dead. I felt

very, very sad about the doll. [crying a bit] And I still do, you see! My emotions seem to reappear in a terrible way!

Riess: Did you cry at the time do you think?

M. Foster: I don't think so. I think I just had inner anguish.

I cry when I'm talking to people, I cry very easily. I was interested that Krakie said she'd never cried. My sister never cried, my mother never cried, but I cry just thinking about it! So this will be a hazard in my talking about these things--I can't help crying [laughs]! I'm not as bad as I used to be.

Yesterday was my birthday, and trying to figure out what I'd like to do, I said to George, "Why don't we go to a movie?" George said, "Okay, let's go to a movie." Well, there were quite a few good movies in town. The Gilbert & Sullivan one had just come and I thought, "That'll be here a long time, we can go to that later." I'd been wanting to go see *Toy Story II*. I hadn't seen *Toy Story*, and I hadn't even wanted to, but I read good reviews of *Toy Story II*, and so we went to that. Then we went out quietly by ourselves to a very good restaurant for dinner.

But *Toy Story II*, after we'd sat there for a few minutes George got the way he gets when we go to movies or plays that he doesn't like, which makes it difficult for me to choose things for him to go to. He'll go out and sit in the lobby, or he'll go home and come back and pick me up or something. He can't sit through things. Or else I'll leave because he wants to. I have to be very choosy, keeping him in mind if we're going to go together. I didn't think he'd probably like this one very well, but he does sometimes does like animated films.

After about two minutes he was getting restless and he said, "Are you enjoying this?" I nodded and I said "yes." I could have said, "If you want to go home, okay, let's go home." But then I thought--"It's my birthday! Why do I have to cater to him! Maybe he'll just cater to me this time," so I went on sitting there. He sort of calmed down. I knew he wasn't particularly enjoying it, but I thought, "Well, let him suffer through it a little bit."

I didn't like all the movie, but I thought it was really rather clever. It was partly organized from a child's point of view--children would like the movie--because it had to do with children rejecting their dolls as they grew up. In the end the dolls, who have rebelled and gone off on their own, were really

conflicted because they loved the children. There are a lot of episodes which are really a satire on adult movies or adult culture, which I thought were really quite funny.

In one episode the dolls get into a toy store where there are thousands of Barbies, thousands of cowboy dolls like the doll that's the hero. The doll that's the hero is exactly like the others, and so is another doll that's part of the family scene. But they are unique because while they look exactly like the others, they have loved a child. It's touching. [laughing] Now I'm going to cry again!

I got thinking how that's exactly the way I felt about toys and dolls, and so did Melissa. Melissa has got to go see this movie. I've still got toys of Melissa's that she would never give away; if I ever mention it to her, she won't let me give them away. I think, other children would love to play with those toys, which are kind of bedraggled but still viable toys. Anyway this is perhaps not connected, but it's the way I felt about my toys.

Riess: Mothers make the argument that poor children could enjoy these toys now. But of course, for a child that's a fairly threatening argument.

M. Foster: Some mothers seem to put that across very nicely, get their children to give away their toys before Christmas because they were getting new toys. I couldn't possibly have done that.

So Bernice died. And then my great-grandmother died. I went to the funeral. I was nine years old and I was afraid of death, I didn't know how to deal with death. I worried because when we got there [Warsaw, Indiana] I was assigned a room to share with a cousin of my father's, a grown woman who came without her family. I didn't know her, and I thought, "Would she want to go see the body?"

I didn't know if the body was in the house. There was something about the possibility of the body being there in the house--I had a superstitious strange feeling about it--and how was I to talk to people who are grieving? Because I had never met this great-grandmother--my sister had been taken there to visit. But my great-grandmother was ninety-five, so she lived a long life.

Riess: Why wasn't your sister on this trip?

M. Foster: Because she'd already been to Warsaw. Warsaw, Indiana was where my father had the happiest part of his childhood. That

was like a family home to him, to the extent that he ever had a stable place.

Those were my first experiences with death. Fortunately, I didn't have to view the body. That would have scared me a great deal. Of course I read books about death. Every girl used to read *Little Women* and cry over Beth's death, and my father had kept his favorite childhood book, which was *Toby Tyler, Or, Ten Weeks With the Circus*--this little boy who'd run away and joined the circus. He had a pet monkey when he was in the circus, and the monkey died, and this was really a tearjerker.

I was as fond of animals as I was of dolls. I wept just as much over Toby Tyler's losing his pet as I did over Beth's death. Deaths were real tearjerkers. Our first pet was a cat, and--this goes back to linguistics--[before we had the cat] my sister and I wrote on our little easel blackboard, "Florence LeCron, Mary LeCron--they have no pets."

I don't think we did it trying to affect our parents, I think we just were feeling sorry for ourselves. It was just a statement about these girls: they had no pets. But our mother got feeling sorry for us, and she got us a red Angora cat that we named Rusty. We had little doll baby-buggies, and we'd dress the cat in our dolls' clothes and put it in the buggy. I don't know what happened to that cat, I can't associate that cat with death. For some reason I have blotted out of my total recall memory what happened to the cat.

My father loved dogs, and he decided we should have a dog. He decided we should have a bloodhound. So he ordered this bloodhound puppy by mail. I think it was two or three months old when we got it. And it was so cute. There is nothing cuter than a bloodhound puppy, with their big paws and their long ears and their sad eyes. We were crazy about this dog. My father gave our dogs names--and we actually only had two dogs in my childhood--and this first one, this bloodhound, my father named him Uncle Tom, after *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

We loved him, but he soon got distemper. Apparently he'd had the distemper germ before we got him. He didn't associate with other dogs, so I don't think there would have been any other way. My father fixed up a place for him to lie in the basement and be left alone. And he died. I've thought about that and the way it kind of affected my feeling about the basement. Because I just felt terrible about the death of this dog, and that makes me cry too, see. I can't go back to my childhood without crying [laughs].

Mrs. Flaherty did the laundry in our basement. And she used to sing while she was ironing, and she sang songs like, "Darling I am growing old, silver threads among the gold."

Riess: Lugubrious!

M. Foster: Lugubrious songs, and she sang them in a lugubrious voice. She talked to us about death quite a lot. I don't think my parents particularly talked about it. I don't think it was taboo, but I just don't think it was something they would bring up.

Riess: Did you ask your parents about death, about whatever questions you had?

M. Foster: I don't remember talking about it. I suppose we certainly might have. There wasn't anything we particularly didn't talk about to our parents. But this was my feeling about death.

When I was two or three years old I'd been put to bed and I began to cry, and my mother heard me crying and came in. She said, "Why are you crying?" I said, "Because everything eats everything else." And you know, this was my first epiphany, shall we say, it suddenly dawned on me that that was the life cycle, that was the way things were, everything had to eat something else. That was the way it was, and that was the way it had to be. There was no way to be comforted out of that one. But having come to grips with the fact that that's the way life is, I think that was the way I looked at death when it came my way later in my great-grandmother who died.

Also I came to grips with the fact that animals killed each other. It wasn't just people who killed animals and ate them, that's the way animals were. Animals, to live, had to kill and eat something. When we were in Africa I witnessed a lion pack killing a zebra. This was a marvelous experience. The lionesses crept through the long grass in a row, very slowly toward this zebra. The zebra was grazing, and it had its back to them, feeding away happily, completely unaware. I wanted to say, "Turn around, don't be stupid, you're going to be in trouble."

The lionesses kept creeping, and all of a sudden the second lioness in the row leapt forward and jumped the zebra and got a grip on him and knocked him down. Then the lion, who was way in the back following the wives, came forward, took control, took the zebra by the throat in a very firm grip, and just hung on until the zebra died. And of course the zebra was kicking and trying to get away.

I tell this story to friends and they say, "Oh, but the poor zebra, how could you watch that! How could you watch that zebra die? Didn't you feel just terrible?" Actually, I didn't. Because the lions had to kill in order to live, and so the zebra had to die if the lions got there.

If I stop and think about the zebra--well obviously the zebra was suffering, but I was so interested in the whole performance. When the zebra did die, and you could tell when it died, the lion let go of the throat and came back to the entrails which became his meal because he was the most important. And one lioness, he wouldn't let feed. The others could, but one poor lioness, I really did feel for her. She went and lay by the nose of the zebra in a sad sort of way. She finally got some morsels, but she was not in favor for whatever reason. The whole family scene of how the lions handled each other, was such an interesting social problem that that was what I was focusing on.

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Riess: You say that the philosophy that "everything eats everything" really helps you.³

M. Foster: Yes, it does help me. That way you don't have such a bleeding heart all the time. Feeling sorry for everything, every creature, animals. I have such strong feelings about animals. I even have strong feelings about plants.

Riess: It's not a sensitivity because of the cancer.

M. Foster: No it's my flaw, my basic flaw. It's a handicap I've struggled with all my life. All my life I've burst into tears, but I'm worse now. I mean, there are more things to burst into tears about, or I can't sidestep it. I've spent my life sidestepping! [laughs]⁴ When George and I have disagreements and I burst into tears, he can't stand that, but I can't not burst into tears. So every time we have a problem, we thrash it out, and it improves, but first we go through this awful thing where I'm in tears. I went through psychoanalysis and that helped, I got better, but I'm right back where I started from, I seem to be just as weepy as I ever was.

³From Interview #10.

⁴Laughter is a way of sidestepping. MF

Riess: Usually psychoanalysis is to tap an understanding of your emotions.

M. Foster: Of course, that's the reason I did it--well, a lot of the reason I did it was because of my problems with George and the children. After I went into psychoanalysis I got him to--but it took a lot of doing, we had a lot of conflict. But the interesting thing about this is that we always have seen eye to eye about basic things. What we liked to do, building our house, our tastes just tally beautifully. I can always count on him having the right reactions to things. [end insert]

My mother had two very serious operations in my childhood, and she went away for them. The first one, I think she went to Cleveland. I can't remember which came first, but actually I think the mastectomy came first. Now, she always said she didn't have cancer--when we'd ask her about that later, she'd say, "No, no, it wasn't cancer." I never knew whether it was because it was so terrible to have cancer. She wouldn't want anybody to think she'd had cancer. But she did have a breast removed, and she wore a prosthesis. So I grew up with this missing breast.

Also my total recall takes me to a time when I must have been nursing: my mother always called breasts "dinners." I'd be in her room, and she'd be dressing or undressing, and she would talk about her breast as "dinner." I thought about breasts as dinner, just as I thought about defecation as "work." My mother would put us on the little toilet chair they had for little children, and she would say, "Now work." She was trying to get us to have bowel movements.

The offshoot of that is that Bunny and I--this was after our house was built, so I was three to four--we were playing out on the front steps of our house and I had to interrupt whatever it was we were playing. I said, "I have to go in and work." As I said it, I realized that the paper boy had just come into the yard and heard me. I was just humiliated that he would have heard me say, "I have to work." Well, obviously "work" didn't mean that to him!

It's interesting the way you get your vocabulary contaminated by these things that your mother says to you. Your breast is dinner. I never liked the word "breast." There was something about the word "breast."

Riess: Talking about Flaherty giving you your baths, did you grow up with much physical affection and contact?

M. Foster: No. I was going to talk about that too, I think it is important. My mother was not cuddly, and my mother hated to be touched. If I'd come up and touch her hair, she'd push me away. Bunny hated to be touched. So we didn't grow up as little sisters that had physical interaction with each other.

My father touched us--my father would put us on his lap, and tease us. He had something he called "bubbling." He'd put his mouth on our neck and blow and it made a noise. I didn't like to have my father grab me because he teased me. I would run away and say, "No, no, no!" And he would, of course, manage to grab me. Being interfered with physically was a kind of a scary thing. Even though I was fond of my father, and my father was more fun than anybody else, his way of having fun often was going against what I would have wanted.

When I think about my grandmothers--did I sit on their laps? My Grandma Cowles, my mother's mother whom I always admired very much--in a way she's a role model to me--I don't remember ever sitting on her lap. We talked about school, especially when I was in college. She wanted to know everything I was studying, and what it was like. She was marvelously interested in everything I was interested in.

My mother cared about the kind of books we read and would talk to us endlessly about them. Talking, good communication with these women, was important. But it wasn't physical. My Grandma LeCron, my father's mother--I do think I sat on her lap, but not a lot. She made doll clothes for us, and she told us about our father's childhood, we had that kind of conversation with her. I think physically she was more affectionate, but I didn't see as much of her. I really didn't have women that I caressed or cuddled with.

All her life Bunny hated to be touched. I'd get into this too, "Don't touch me!" We'd run away. We'd tease each other about trying to pretend we were going to kiss each other, whatever it was. But then we'd protest and so there wasn't ever affectionate physical contact. I'm interested in my grandchildren, who are pairs of sisters, how very physically affectionate they are. And I'm sort of envious, I wish I had grown up like that, but that was not my fate. I'm affectionate with my nieces, and with my children. And my nieces are very affectionate. Gene, their father, was very affectionate with all of us--he was very loving and huggy.

Riess: You talk about the prohibition of talking about cancer. Maybe there were other prohibitions at work.

M. Foster: I don't know that they were about touching children.

What I hate about nowadays is that if any teacher puts an arm around a child, this is construed as child abuse. Teachers have to be so careful. Teachers used to be able to hug you if they wanted to comfort you.

Riess: Yes.

Let's go back to the life cycle theme.

M. Foster: Let me go back to the animal death first, because I had a really bad experience when I was twelve, when I went off to camp. The tents that we slept in had wooden floors that were raised above ground, and I had to get down to the meeting place--Point House, out over the lake, a very pretty place--and I jumped off the tent floor. Just as I jumped, a chipmunk ran across, and I came down right on the chipmunk and broke its back. This makes me cry! It's just awful [laughs].

Riess: You laugh and cry!

M. Foster: I laugh because I think it's so ridiculous that I cry.

This far removed from killing a chipmunk, it still breaks my heart. My sister and I had tamed chipmunks. We'd sit on our front porch and hold food and get the chipmunk to come and eat out of our hand. On camping trips we loved it because the chipmunks in parks would be tame and we could feed them.

To kill this chipmunk was just a horrible experience. I ran down to the Point House and one of the counselors, sort of a major figure, a Protestant minister, Presbyterian, I'm not quite sure what, he was there. I was crying and he comforted me. He put his arm around me, and helped me get over having killed this chipmunk.

That's the only animal I ever killed. I couldn't any more have hunted animals! Death was inevitable, but you didn't have to kill animals!

I'll get back to illness. My mother had her mastectomy, and my mother had a goiter operation, and both times she was away from home. One time she'd been mutilated--she'd lost her breast. The second time, she had had goiter and she had a goiter operation. My grandmother, her mother, also had a goiter, but she never had it operated on. She wore a high lace collar; all her dresses were like that with a high lace collar.

Both my sister and I, after our mother's goiter operation, had to take iodine pills. It's dietary they say--there isn't enough iodine in your diet. Iowa was a bad place. If you live by the sea and you eat fish, then you don't get goiters, supposedly. I'm not absolutely sure if that's completely true, but that's the theory.

So there was goiter in the family. Bunny and I took iodine, but we both developed goiter and so has Melissa. George and I were going to go to Mexico to do fieldwork where you get so far away from civilization, if you need operations, you can't get them. So we decided that I should have the operation--this was called an adenoma, really a lump on the thyroid gland. So I went to San Francisco and that was my first one. It grew again, and when we were living in Washington I had a second one. Traumatic for my children, the separation and the operation, and I suppose the thought that I might die.

Earlier, when I was eight years old, I had been having a lot of ear trouble and so they had to do a mastoid operation. I was in the hospital, and Uncle Frank, the husband of my grandmother's sister Aunt Bert, operated on me. He was an ear, nose, and throat doctor. This was quite an experience, being in the hospital. I had a private room with a private nurse named Miss Ryder, and I loved Miss Ryder, and I quite liked the routine of the hospital.

Miss Ryder taught me to embroider, and I embroidered a handkerchief for my mother, which I gave to her after I got out of the hospital. She put it away and she never used it, I never saw it again--exactly what happened every time I made something and gave it to my mother. She was very sweet and nice, "Oh isn't that lovely, thank you." And she never used it--it dropped out of sight! [laughs] She would have been shocked to hear I felt that way! It just wasn't something she wanted to use. She appreciated that it was sweet of me to want to make it.

Anyway, Miss Ryder took care of me at the hospital. I was scared. It was a Catholic hospital, and the nuns would come in in their black robes and scare me half to death. They didn't come in often, fortunately. I didn't mind being in the hospital, really. My sister and I had just had a fight. We didn't really fight an awful lot, but we had been quarrelling about something and gotten quite angry with each other. Maybe partly because I was sick I was in a bad humor--heaven only knows.

When I was declared as having to have an operation, then it was very serious. I'm sure my mother talked about it in a very hush-hush voice. My sister said, "Well, I don't care--I hope she dies." My mother took that so much to heart, that Bunny should have said, "I hope she dies," and it got quoted a lot afterwards, after I'd recovered and all was well. "I hope she dies." It must have been horrible for Bunny to have that repeated all the time, but I never took it very seriously. I know children say, "I hope she dies." [laughs]

Riess: During your mother's operations did somebody come and live with you all?

M. Foster: Yes, I remember that somebody came and took care of us. I really remember it mostly for the goiter. And we didn't really like the woman very well. I don't remember thinking maybe my mother will die, but I suppose I did. Anyway, it was a trauma.

Riess: I'm curious about whether you yearned for religion in some way.

M. Foster: Oh yes, you reminded me. Because Mrs. Flaherty--see, Mrs. Flaherty had this kind of negative effect on me. She talked about God.

If I asked my mother about God, she'd say, "God is love." My mother was actually quietly quite religious, but she never went to church. She wasn't religious in an organized religion way, but she believed in God. My father was an atheist, he completely rejected God. He's like George--he'd had to go to Sunday school and church too much when he was a little boy. So he was busy not being involved with God.

But Mrs. Flaherty told me a story about a little boy who'd said he didn't believe in God, and then he was struck by lightning or met some kind of a sudden death. That frightened me so much that it became an obsession with me; if I found myself thinking at all about God, I'd have to say to myself, "I believe in God, I believe in God." Not aloud, it was just going through my head in order to prevent being struck by lightning or being struck down and dying. So, obviously I was afraid of dying.

Babies

Riess: How about the birth part of the life cycle?

M. Foster: Okay. My Aunt Bertha, whose wedding I had been prevented from going to because I was too little, and I had watched them all go away to the wedding, about a year later gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl named Gardie and Betsy. She was Mary Elizabeth, but she was called Betsy, and he was named Gardner after our grandfather. They lived in Algona, the maternal family home--Bertha had married an Algona man. The twins were born February 6th, so they were nearly exactly four years younger than I.

When Bertha brought the babies home to her mother's house, Bunny and I would be hanging around and seeing these babies. They were the first babies I'd really known about or seen--and this is the first time I ever saw that a boy baby was different from a girl baby, which I'm sure I didn't talk about, but that was interesting. I have a mental image--exact picture--in my head of seeing the twins being changed or bathed or dressed, and here was Gardie who had a little penis, and nobody explained to me that it was a penis. Nobody told me. That was my first notice that there was a difference between boys and girls. But I didn't ask questions of this kind. I have always been a very questioning person, but in my childhood, I just absorbed things and never asked.

The twins became a very important part of my life--always. I loved to play with them. They adored me, which probably had something to do with it. They were very imaginative children, and they loved to play imaginative games. Although they looked up to me, when we were playing they interacted. We all had the same kind of thoughts and things that we thought were fun to do.

If I was playing with the twins, and Bunny would come in, it would change the picture completely, it would spoil the game--I just can't tell you exactly how. If I'd be playing with Bunny, we could play imaginative games and play with each other. We were with the twins a lot, and we were fine if we were both with the twins, unless the twins and I had some game going. Maybe it was the stepping in, that she didn't know the background of the game or something, but it would change it.

I had other little cousins, born later, so I got more familiar with looking at babies. But I never had any care of babies, except playing with the twins, if that was care. Baby-sitting, that came later. People who came in to help with children weren't called baby sitters.

With the twins though--we went up to Algona when the twins were a year and a half. It was May. My aunt and uncle

were going away on a vacation or business--he was a lawyer--and Bertha asked my mother if she would come up and take care of the twins. So we went up, and my mother took along one of George Timmony's sisters, because my mother really was not very good taking care of babies. I always kind of wondered how she took care of us when we were little babies. It never seemed to me she had a way with little babies. She was good with older children--little babies not.

Anyway, the twins were a year and a half, they weren't toilet-trained, they were in diapers that had to be taken care of. I was with them, and playing with them, and Betsy put on her own sock. You know how little kids want to do their thing. I was so proud of her--I probably talked her through it or something--and when my mother came in, I said, "Betsy put on her own sock! It was kind of messy, but she did it."

My mother said, "Messy?" That was another of these words, you see, like "work," it meant the same thing. She said, "Oh, she made a mess, and now I have to go get Frances." And I said, "No, no." I suppose the word "mess" in that sense maybe was faintly familiar to me too, except that I'd gotten toilet trained so early. But you know, this is--[laughs] kind of a funny thing.

Riess: You're reflecting on this, but maybe you never really gave the subjects any more thought until you had your own children.

M. Foster: Oh yes, what you do is to realize the mistakes that your mother made with you.

When we were living in Berkeley, in a house on LeRoy, our neighbors were fairly close on each side. Jeremy and I were coming up the walk. We'd moved into that house when Jeremy was fourteen months old, so I think Jeremy was about two--talking quite well. He fell down on the walk, on his face, and he began to yell and cry, and said, "Mommy, I hurt my penis!" I thought, "Oh, Lord," the neighbors can hear this!

There were words that I'd been trained you didn't speak out loud, or people just didn't, you know. Nowadays--lots of things like "fuck"--Krakie talked about that quite a bit too in her oral history, that there were words that you couldn't use that now suddenly had gotten to be okay. Penis was one that you just didn't use. So you see, I was teaching my children differently. I gave them names for things.

Riess: Did you feel free and easy as a mother?

M. Foster: Oh, I was wonderful with children [laughs]. Well, it was a little bit hard for me in the beginning, when I first had Jeremy. When I came home from the hospital--because I stayed in the hospital for ten days, and I had had a Caesarean so that I was still not completely back to normal--I had a practical nurse who came, and I think she stayed maybe two weeks, quite a while, so she was really doing the physical things with the baby. But when she took her day off, and he began having bowel movements, I changed him. The minute I changed him he went on with a bowel movement [laughs]. I'd never had to cope with this, and I was just at my wits' end.

It didn't absolutely come naturally to me to take care of a baby, but I learned very fast. I'd always loved babies and little children, so I think it came to me more easily than it did to Bunny. When Jeremy was three and Karen was two--Bunny's first child--we took the train back to Des Moines, to visit our grandmother. We had a drawing room that I slept in with both of our children, and she slept in a lower berth. I can't remember how long it takes--two or three days to get to Des Moines from California, or it used to--but it was sort of automatic that I was the one that could take care of her child. I think she would have been uncomfortable taking care of my child. I never felt as if it came as easily to her.

Riess: Maybe here I should introduce the life cycle subject of menstruation--a subject that Margaret Mead goes into in some detail in her autobiographical writing.

M. Foster: Okay. When I was in the ninth grade some of the girls would be excused from gym, and my mother called it "the sick time."

Riess: Did your mother introduce the subject to you?

M. Foster: I don't know, because it happened to Bunny first. But it was always hush-hush, your "sick time," and we weren't looking forward to it.

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M. Foster: The year I was fourteen, when I was getting ready to go to camp, my mother put Kotex in my trunk. We had little steamer trunks in the tent at the foot of our bed that we kept our stuff in. She put Kotex in, so I'd be supplied. I did know what to do because I had a belt, the belt that you fastened your Kotex to, that was ready for me, and since Bunny had been through this, I knew what I was getting into.

Now this is part of another story about a death. I'd been at camp for two years, and each summer there had been an expedition to climb Mount Washington. I had only climbed the lesser mountains because not until I was fourteen was I considered old enough to do Mount Washington. So this year I was signed up to climb Mount Washington. But this was the summer our tent counselor died of polio. She got sick at camp, and they put her in the hospital nearby. This was a death that was very close to me--in each tent there were only three girls and a counselor--and she was young, she was eighteen.

In any event, I was on my way to Mount Washington, and the expedition turned around because the directress of the camp was coming back in the car and we were to come back. Then it turned out that Lorrie had died. The whole thing was very traumatic. We didn't know it was polio.

My parents suspected it was polio when we wrote to them about it. So they talked to a doctor friend. Well, of course the camp--if we'd been exposed they had to wait and see what happened. So they weren't about to scare all the parents to death, and they weren't about to scare us to death. So we didn't know what it was. But anyway, we knew that she died.

But what were we talking about?

Riess: Menstruation.

M. Foster: Yes, so I had to turn around from this trip and go back, and it was fortunate I did because I instantly began actually to have my period. Fortunately, I was back where I could do something about it. But I didn't know how long it was going to last, I didn't know what--where I stood with respect to it. I don't remember talking to Bunny about it, though I may have.

Marriage and Divorce

M. Foster: When I think about social issues and the life cycle, I think about books I read. Beth's death in *Little Women*, for example. I'm sure a lot of little girls learned about death from Beth, and coming to grips with that. In my family nobody died unless they were very elderly. Really we were a family who had no bad things happening. My maternal grandparents, with whom I always was in close touch, really had no serious grief in their family. They had six good, healthy, smart children.

And then my mother's youngest brother, Mike, got married. Mike was just twelve years older than I was. He was growing up in my childhood, he was becoming adolescent, he was having girlfriends. He had a girlfriend that he gave a baby rabbit to for Easter. Her parents didn't want her to have the baby rabbit, or for some reason the rabbit was abandoned by her, so he gave the baby rabbit to Bunny and me.

Everything Mike did was terribly interesting. Mike was experimental. Mike had an incubator, and baby chicks that he was bringing along. These things didn't last very long--the incubator stood in Grandma's attic later, and it was never gotten rid of. There it was, just a memory of Mike's childhood.

Mike had a collie dog named Peggy, and Bunny and I adored Peggy. She was the first dog we adored. That was long before we had Uncle Tom and later Sirius. (My father named Sirius after the Dog Star because bloodhounds were "serious" dogs. So my father was a good dog namer. I never thought Uncle Tom was a very good name, but Sirius was okay.)

Well, Mike fell in love with a girl from Ames, Iowa. I think her father was a professor at Iowa State. Her name was Helen Curtis. We were going to camp by that time, and we liked Helen because Helen liked everything outdoorsy. We thought she should be a camp counselor. She'd be the perfect camp counselor because that was the way she was about nature and animals and things like that.

Oh, first John, the next-oldest brother, got married. John married Betty. Betty came from Oswego, New York, so she was an easterner, very eastern, and we liked Betty too. She was amusing, she had a good sense of humor.

But Helen was outdoorsy, and she liked horses and horseback riding. And they had pets. They had a Schnauzer dog, first time I ever heard of a Schnauzer. They had a parrot, they had a monkey--maybe they didn't have the parrot yet--but they had a monkey. They had a cute house that they furnished. They had a roadster car with the top that went down. If you're growing up as a teenager--you think, well, this is the way marriage should be. Actually, to his sisters Mike was absolutely perfect, the little brother who could do no wrong.

The Call family was very caught up with wanting boys because my great-grandparents, my grandmother's parents, had had a series of girls. Then they had a boy who died in

childhood. His name was Glen. They wanted a boy in the worst way, and they finally got two boys, but much later. So boys were revered.

My grandmother's youngest siblings were twins, a boy and girl. This kind of ran in the family, boy and girl twins. They were not much older than my mother, and they were always called "the babies" in these letters I was telling you about. Their names were Roscoe and Myrtle. They were called Rock and Myrtie, and their sisters adored them. But first, there was a boy named Chester, and then a few years later, there were the twins. So there were two boys finally in the family. But there was a whole series of girls before that.

Roscoe got married just about the same time my mother did, I think. And she looked up to him. He was her uncle, but he was close to her in age. We never called our uncles and aunts, "uncle and aunt," I think because our parents had younger siblings, and they were always referred to by their names, and so we picked up the names. So the people we called aunt and uncle were my grandparents' brothers and sisters.

Rock and his wife, May, lived in Des Moines and they had a little boy who was more or less the same age as Bunny--slightly younger maybe, but not very much. His name was Ambrose. He was named after his grandfather, who was my great-grandfather. Bunny was bald when she was born and it took her quite a while to get any hair. I had hair when I was born. I had quite a pate of dark, darkish brown hair, and she was bald. Ambrose was very big and hearty and very cute, I guess. Bunny got very cute as she got older, but as a baby she was not particularly cute, and she had no hair, so my mother kept little bonnets on her because she didn't like to show off that she had a bald child. My mother really always felt sort of inferior to Rock and May, who had this boy baby, because she had this girl baby who was not as hearty looking.

Riess: She really did?

M. Foster: I could always tell that she felt inferior because she'd say about us as girls, she'd say, "Well, I don't think Dad"--she always referred to him as Dad, and he hated to be called Dad by her--she'd say, "I don't think Dad cares that you were girls." Well, I don't think Dad actually cared a bit. He loved us. He called us his "harem." My mother and Bunny and I were his "harem." He liked that. I think it was just her feeling about how important it was to have boys. So Mike was always revered.

Mike, of course, was very successful with the newspapers, and starting *Look* magazine and all these things. He started *Look* when Bunny and I were adolescent, and for the first issues of *Look* that were going to come out--we were sort of the trial balloon because he thought teenage girls were more like the kind of audience he was trying to touch. People who didn't have very high standards! We were his guinea pigs. That was flattering in a way, and we enjoyed it, but in a way it was sort of a put down, that we didn't have literary tastes.

Anyway, everything that Mike did was very much admired by his sisters all the way through his life. They had two other brothers, but Mike was the darling. He was the little brother, you know, so he could do no wrong.

Then came the day at Sunday dinner at my grandparents' house. After Sunday dinner, we were all sitting around in the sort of sunroom--the whole family was there, and Bunny and I were there. And Mike said, "There's something I want to tell you, and I'll tell you now, and you can say anything you want to about it. But I want that to be the end of it. Have your say now." And then he said, "Helen and I are getting a divorce." We all gasped. It was a terrible shock to me and Bunny because we had thought this was the perfect couple, you know.

Then everyone began to speak up. My father, who was especially fond of Helen said, "Well, if we're to say what we think, I think it's just terrible." And he went on and made quite a speech about how he felt about it. Betty, who always was kind of jealous about Helen, began saying unpleasant things about her. Then other people defended Helen. It was kind of an argumentative scene.

Riess: An extraordinary scene.

M. Foster: Well, this was kind of typical of the family [laughs]. You'd bring things to the family. You'd discuss it, and then that's it.

Riess: Did you fantasize a lot about marriage?

Foster: Yes, and I told you about how Bunny and I played that we were the Duchess and the Baroness. And the cookbooks my mother wrote with her friend, the story behind the recipes was of Bob and Bettina, and they had the perfect marriage. They had two

children, a boy and a girl, in that order.⁵ So you see, I replicated that in having my children. I had a boy and a girl, what in children's books too was considered the perfect family.

Shyness and Control, and Bunny

M. Foster: [change of subject after discussion off the tape] I'm a linguist. In linguistic anthropology we think a lot about power and control in dialogue, and what does dialogue do? People want to be in control, people don't want to be put down. Some kinds of people have to be controlling--some people are much more controlling than other people. So I think that was part of my hesitation about thrusting my idea about the conduct of these interviews into the mix of chronology and topic and so on--because I'm not one who likes to feel controlling, though maybe I don't come across that way.

I apparently don't come across as being shy, even though I have all these shy feelings all the time. Krakie [Theodora Kroeber] didn't come across as shy either, but in her oral history she talks all the time about how shy she is. Shy people--well, maybe everybody feels shy, I don't know. Krakie was kind of controlling, in a way; although she was good at talking to people and drawing them out, she was pretty opinionated about things, a little bit like Bunny. (I have a little problem with talking about Bunny, because her daughters, who love me as I love them, and know I'm doing my oral history, say, "Oh, let us know when it's available--we all want copies.")

Bunny's daughters talk to me about Bunny being very closed. Bunny died two years ago, and she wouldn't talk about her coming death, even though she was very sick and nobody thought she was going to live. Although they didn't exactly say that this was fatal, she'd sort of taken to her bed and wouldn't go anywhere. When she was still mobile, she wouldn't go out, go anywhere, she was very private about it. The girls really wanted to talk about the fact that she might die, and what this meant to everybody, or what she was thinking about it. She would shut them up the minute they'd try to get on the topic. She had them buffaloed.

⁵I think I was wrong here; I think the girl, Sue, was first. MF

When we were talking later, I told her daughters that the worst fight I had with Bunny was when our mother died and we were going through her things. She had a sewing basket--she didn't sew, but maybe she mended a stitch or two from time to time--and in it there was a poem, and I took it out and I said, "Oh, a poem!" and started reading it. Bunny got so mad at me--I may have said something else about wanting to see what she'd kept of her writing--and Bunny said, "You want to get your snoopy little hands into everything." She got mad at me, and I got mad back, and we began screaming at each other. She thought I was snoopy because I wanted to know about my mother, and what she wrote, and what her private things were.

I told this to my nieces on Sunday because they've been going through the house. The three of them that live out of town came over here and brought me these family letters. They are so thrilled with the family history thing. We were talking about all kinds of subjects, including their parents' deaths, because Gene, their father, died recently. I told them we had had this awful fight because she told me I was snoopy. They said, "Oh, we're snoopy. We have been so disappointed because Mom didn't keep anything!"

Bunny wrote poetry, and she never would talk about her poetry; she never would show her poetry to me, and to them she never would. She began to paint, and she never would show me anything that she painted. She was a critical person, and I think she was critical of herself.

Riess: Now, I know we're going to be able to find the connection back. We were talking about being controlling.

M. Foster: Yes, I didn't want to be controlling. That's why I hesitated to say to you that I'm more topic-oriented, and it's easier for me to take a topic and follow through, than to answer, "What did you do when you were twelve or thirteen?" or something like that. Because then I may take a thread, then I'll drop it and take another, and then all these things that I think are important get left out.

Riess: So you were worrying about what kind of an oral history interviewee you would be, with the control issue.

M. Foster: Yes, because you don't know about yourself. Whether people think you're controlling, or you're not controlling.

When Gene died--we don't have funerals, and we don't have church memorial services. We just have these things where we sit around in people's houses and everybody tells little

anecdotes and laughs. And I've never been to one of these where people were more adoring than they were at Gene's.

Now, there was another thing about Gene--Gene flunked out of college. Gene was not a reader, so he wasn't a college graduate, and he was not intellectual at all. And Bunny came out of the same family as I did where everybody read, everybody was at least moderately intellectual if not super-intellectual. My parents belonged to a little group that called themselves, "The Intelligentsia." It was a joke, but they were people who were interested in books and reading.

Gene was cut out of such a different cloth, and Bunny fell in love with him and married him. Fortunately, he had a wonderful sense of humor. He loved practical jokes, as my father did. He loved games, and he and my father, who both liked all these funny things, hit it off like a house afire.

But I think because I married somebody who got his Ph.D., became a college professor--Bunny really took a dislike to the university. I think it was because my mother always made us be compared to each other--Bunny had pretty curly hair, I had mousy straight hair. Bunny had a beautifully shaped head, my head was flat in the back. Bunny had beautiful long fingers like Dad's, I had little stubby fingers like hers.

Riess: You always came off short in these comparisons?

M. Foster: Pretty much. Maybe it just seemed that way, but I think it's true. I don't think she was aware she was doing this. I was praised for having nice pink cheeks.

Bunny and I both thought, talking about it later, that she praised us for the things we didn't value about ourselves, that we thought were just run-of-the-mill, but that she would put great stress on. She said, "Bunny fries bacon so nicely--Bunny knows how to fry bacon." Of course, I came out of it thinking I didn't know how to fry bacon. A lot of this made me feel as if I didn't do things well. Then when I got married my mother-in-law--they were visiting us and I was frying bacon--my mother-in-law said, "Oh, Mickie, you fry bacon so beautifully." [laughs]

Hospitals

M. Foster: I talked about the fact that I had a mastoid operation. I really like hospitals. I was glad to go home, but I liked the routine. I was interested in it. It was a social scene that I didn't know, and I liked Miss Ryder who was taking care of me. When it was time to go home, George my friend, my grandmother's chauffeur, drove me home, with my mother, and I was put in bed downstairs in the guest room.

Joey came to see me, and Joey had on overalls and bare feet, dirty bare feet, and I was in this nice white clean bed, and she put her little dirty feet up on the bed. I thought I would have not have been turned off by that--but there was something about coming out of this sanitary hospital environment and getting back into the real world that I was affected by. I think the experience changed my way of looking at the world, or at least showed me that there were two ways of looking at things. It didn't change my relationship to Joey at all, but it did affect my relation to illness and hospitals.

I've been in the hospital quite a few times for one thing and another, nothing life-threatening like mastoid which really was, but I've had various kinds of operations. I never minded going to the hospital. And when I was twelve or thirteen, I was going through braces on my teeth, so I spent time at the dentist. I don't mind going to the dentist.

When I was little, they hovered over our bowels--somebody said that what's usually called the Bible Belt could be called the Bowel Belt because people are so concerned about their bowels. It really was true. Well, Gandhi also worried about his bowels [laughs]. Anyway, we were given something called calalactose, and the pills were flavored with wintergreen, and I just couldn't take candy or anything that had a wintergreen taste for a long time because of that. Or we were given mineral oil in orange juice. Bunny never could stand orange juice after that.

I just couldn't swallow pills, so that my mother always crushed them up and put them in something to get them down me. Well, at some point I got so that I can take a pill with no trouble whatsoever. When I was living in France, I got the flu or something, and they gave me pills about the size of silver dollars. I thought, "I won't be able to swallow that," but I did.

I got over the fear of illness and the fear of hospitals. Now that I'm going through chemotherapy--people say, "You're so brave."⁶ Well, I'm not brave. You're in this, you're going through it, you can't spend your time weeping over it! I've developed really quite good endurance for things. I can go through it if I think it's going to be over. If I thought I was going to die from it--well, I suppose I can't really let myself think, "What if I die," so I don't.

People treat me differently now that I have cancer, and that's interesting. They take on a different tone of voice, sort of like my mother was always doing. "Oh, how are you doing?" They're so solicitous of me. I really don't like to be the center of attention like that, I don't want people to be solicitous, so I laugh and kid around about it.

When I begin to cry, is when it comes to Melissa, because she's going through the same experience. If I know that she's feeling down then I begin to cry--not to myself, it's when I'm trying to tell somebody. I don't know what it is about telling people. I'm fine when I'm talking to her. It's interesting going through it at the same time, because we laugh about our experiences, or we tell each other how terrible we've felt--whatever. But she worries about me and I worry about her.

⁶Mary Foster was being treated for ovarian cancer. Her daughter Melissa was being treated for breast cancer.

IV DES MOINES AND BEYOND

[Interview 4: February 4, 2000] ##

Family Life

Riess: Do you think that you were a very observant child?

M. Foster: Pretty much so. I certainly noticed things. I wouldn't have such total recall if I hadn't noticed things. I think I thought about relationships, and I was trying to put the world together. I never discussed it with anybody, or asked anybody about it, I just sort of absorbed it and then sort of wondered about it.

Riess: Did you keep diaries?

M. Foster: Not really. At some point somebody gave me one of those little diaries with a key, I think I was beginning high school. I kept it for a little while and then dropped it. Going back and reading it, I thought it was awful--it was so trivial. I liked trivia, but--[laughs]. I couldn't keep up a diary. It would have been good if I had, I suppose. George's mother kept a diary.

Riess: Margaret Mead's mother kept thirteen notebooks on Margaret for the first four years of her life.

M. Foster: Oh, my gosh! My mother was too preoccupied with other things.

Riess: Your upbringing, was it unique, do you think?

M. Foster: Thinking about it, my parents really were unusual. When I compare them with other people's parents, they really were unusual. Both of them were writers, and that was unusual. My mother worked. I had only one friend whose mother worked, and she worked because she had undergone a divorce and she had had to get a job. She became a real estate agent.

My mother's interests--my mother was responsible for the inreach, close-to-the-heart kinds of things--relationships between people. That kind of interest I got from my mother. My father's influence was more outreach, travel, nature, camping trips, that kind of thing, politics, gardening. And actually fantasy too, and languages.

My father told us funny stories. He was really witty. He'd tell us these ridiculous stories. They were sort of like Carl Sandburg's children's stories, which my father admired a great deal. Bunny and I didn't really like Carl Sandburg's stories--*Rootabaga Stories* I think they were called--somehow they didn't quite strike our sense of humor, but Dad thought they were wonderful.

He was very interested in languages. He taught himself Spanish, he taught himself French, he'd studied German in college--he and my mother talked about Christmas, when it was coming up, in German, but we caught on to quite a few things, like *tannenbaum*, so we knew what they were talking about. It was my father who wanted to travel, who wanted to go to Europe. My father had tremendous curiosity, but it was outreach kind of curiosity.

My mother was quite intuitive, but she was quiet. She kept herself to herself, where Dad was constantly entertaining. At the dinner table he was so entertaining. He talked an awful lot about his adventures with his cousins in his childhood, and we were always interested in that. He would tell funny stories, and the three females would all laugh heartily--even though we'd heard them over and over. It was partly because he got such a kick out of telling these things that we were laughing at him a lot of the time. He was just fun to be with.

Riess: And your mother--was she very respectful of him? Or admiring?

M. Foster: No, not especially. They were a team. They bounced off each other a lot. They talked about things.

Riess: A good model of a relationship.

M. Foster: I think so, yes. They were in college together, just the way George and I were. They were both majoring in English literature, so they had a lot of the same educational background. They could quote poetry endlessly, they could make up verse instantly. They could make up limericks, and my dad's were always kind of outrageous and funny. Both Bunny and I could do that. I wondered why other people didn't seem able to get rhyme and rhythm together, but that was just kind of second

nature to us, because of the kinds of interaction that my parents had, I guess.

Household Management Models

M. Foster: Although my mother was interested in food, and she wrote these cookbooks, she always had a maid who cooked. She discussed in the morning what we would have, and she ordered the groceries over the telephone, so she never went to the grocery store--she didn't drive. This pattern of ordering groceries was so ingrained that when I was first married I always ordered the groceries over the telephone too.

Bunny and I didn't learn a thing about cooking. We weren't asked to do anything really useful around the house.

Riess: Did you hang around in the kitchen?

M. Foster: Yes. The cook was not just a cook, she was a maid--all purpose maid. The first one I remember was Anna, and then we had a series that I don't remember very well, and then we had one named Alice--that was about the time we went to camp--and she had an influence on us because she had a boyfriend and she was sort of into popular culture. She played the banjo. So we sat around with her.

These people lived in--we had a maid's room. Our house only had one bathroom in the upstairs, and then downstairs a lavatory. All of us, including the maid, used the one bathroom, there wasn't any separation, except at meals, so we were together a great deal. Some maids we enjoyed more than others, but we learned nothing.

Bunny, when she was engaged to get married, came home from Stanford, and she was trying to learn a little bit about cooking that summer. I was going with George, and George came from his home to visit me in Des Moines after he graduated. (I still had a year left.) He always joked about how Bunny had said, "Can you bake new potatoes?" He thought that was the most ridiculous question. Well, I still don't think it's ridiculous--you obviously can but you don't usually. Sometimes things struck George as odd that I thought were perfectly normal.

Riess: How did you learn to manage?

M. Foster: Well, first we went to Europe after we were married. And then I had a baby right away, the minute I came back from Europe almost, because we were in Europe almost a year. In Europe I didn't have to keep house. I wasn't doing anything there except absorbing things, just the way George was. And we had our anthropological interests, museums, interests in things like that.

After Europe we came back to Washington and visited my parents--that was at Thanksgiving--and then we came back to Berkeley and we rented a cute little house up on Creston Road. One of two little houses, just alike, built in somebody's back yard up on Creston Road.

Then I did cook, but I fell down one day when I was going to the mailbox, which was a kind of walk up the driveway to Creston Road, and I sprained my ankle, or did something. I was very pregnant, and I had to be on crutches, so then we got a woman to come in and cook. Maybe she did a little housework too, I don't remember. When my baby was born--after that both my mother and George insisted that I have a maid. I didn't really want to have a maid, but if they told me I should do something, I did it. I was very meek, and I didn't put my foot down.

Riess: When did that change?

M. Foster: It changed when we moved from Washington to Berkeley when our children were ten and thirteen. I said to George, "I'm not going to have a maid." George protested and we went through this thing. I said, "If I complain about what I have to do, I still don't want to have a maid." I had a pact with him that I could complain if I wanted to, but I didn't want him to keep throwing it up in my face. So from then on, we didn't have a maid. I knew a little bit about cooking I guess, enough so that I could struggle to put things together.

Riess: What was the point?

M. Foster: I just don't like to have somebody around all the time. I'm private. I just don't want to have to be responsible for telling people what to do either. I'd rather do it myself than to tell somebody. That's probably kind of ridiculous, but that's just kind of the way I am [laughs]. So now, if I have to have somebody, I have a cleaning woman. I've always had a cleaning woman who would come through once a week or every two weeks--something like that--depending on circumstances or where we were.

We spent two years in Mexico, and I had to have such a household staff because in Mexico you just had to. I just hated that. I was so glad to get back to Washington where I didn't have to have such a big staff, though I still had a maid. When we went to Spain for a year I started out with just one maid, but Spain was so poverty-stricken and people needed work so badly that I gradually added people [laughs]. Without really meaning to, suddenly I had somebody who was doing the mending, keeping the children's clothes clean, things like that. You paid people just a pittance, and you felt selfish if you didn't give them jobs. So that was just one year, and then I came back to doing it myself.

Riess: It's interesting, because now that you've triumphed over the maid situation, you're in the largest and most demanding of your houses.

M. Foster: Oh, but this house is so convenient. We planned this house so that it would be easy to live in, and because we had lived in so many houses we knew just exactly how we wanted to live. The kitchen, for instance, is the room that I planned the most carefully. I knew just exactly what my work habits were, and I didn't want a dining room, I wanted to eat in the kitchen, and I wanted to have a fireplace. It's my kitchen, and not a very convenient kitchen to have a maid in because we have no dining room.

Recollections of Social Strata, and Houses

Riess: You wanted to say more about social strata in Des Moines.

M. Foster: Yes, and to tell you how that affected us--Bunny and me. And then I wanted to tell you who my parents' closest friends were. They were distributed religiously and ethnically.

I talked about Grand Avenue where the old settlers had built their stately houses. And I told you that we lived on the bluff and the area below us was called the Hollow. We didn't really interact with the Hollow kids very much except for a couple of families that we would visit. Why they were different or appealed to us more than the others--maybe their parents were a little better educated or something, maybe they spoke better English. I don't know that we exactly looked down on the kids that lived in the Hollow, it's just that we didn't associate with them much.

But there was one girl from the Hollow, named Ruth Moss, who was in my class in grade school, a very pretty girl, but totally silent, so she didn't interact with other children, other girls, until she got to high school. The high school drew in a lot of grammar schools, so we didn't know everybody, it was a big high school. And we had to form tables for lunch in the cafeteria, and I had no group to form lunch with. Because the people in my class had formed lunch tables with their neighborhood kids, you know the kids they played with, I didn't have really anybody to form a lunch table with.

So I asked a girl--Susan Watts was her name--whose father and my father worked for the newspaper and were friends--if I could sit with them. She was an awfully nice girl, and I had met her friends, so I thought this would be a good group to sit with. She said, "Oh, I'm sorry, but we've got our table full." It turned out that the last person, the one outside person they had taken in to their table was Ruth Moss! One of these girls, not Susan, but one of her close friends, had befriended Ruth Moss and was trying to be nice to Ruth Moss who she had seen as kind of a loner, I think. So, I was shut out because Ruth Moss was the person that got included in that table.

Riess: Agonizing.

M. Foster: Another story--this incident, I just thought about because it showed a kind of social solidarity. We were all walking home from school--and it was before we separated to go toward our houses--and Bunny's panties fell off! You probably don't remember when little girls wore pantywaists and panties. The panties had button holes that buttoned onto these rubber buttons on your pantywaist, and the holes would get distended, so they would come loose quite easily.

Bunny's panties suddenly fell off, and the boys--Bunny always said the boys went "Hyeah, hyeah, hyeah," that was what they did when they were making fun of you. She was humiliated. But then these girls made a big circle around her to give her time to pull up her panties and get rearranged. I thought that showed a kind of a social solidarity between girls, and I think it's kind of interesting. Because these were all girls that we weren't relating to socially at all.

Bunny had these humiliating things that happened. That was one of them. Then, when she must have been fifteen, Bunny was promoted suddenly to the big table at my grandmother's for the Sunday dinners. She was in high school. My mother's next-to-youngest brother, John Cowles--the Cowles were endlessly curious about everything, and so they were talking about sexual

practices among teenagers, the way people nowadays might too-- John turned to Bunny and asked, "Bunny, how many girls in your class are virgins?"

Bunny was so embarrassed, and she pretended she didn't hear him. She didn't like being promoted to the big table because they put her on the spot as the teenager.

Riess: Would you, in fact, have known who was or was not a virgin?

M. Foster: A little bit. But not from any personal knowledge. There were stories that went around--a girl had left her purse on the seat in the movie theater, and one of my mother's friends had picked it up and looked in it, and she had a diaphragm or something. So we knew she wasn't a virgin. I suppose things trickled out.

Riess: Now, we were talking about the social strata.

M. Foster: Yes. Our family friends, who lived in various places but vaguely close to our neighborhood, one family, the Rileys, were good Catholics. One family were Protestant, probably Episcopalian, and more intellectual than most people. They'd gone to eastern colleges, eastern schools and somehow had a different kind of background, and they were the Parkers.

The Rileys and the Parkers and our family used to have picnics together all the time. The Rileys had six children, and their oldest child, Mary Frances, was halfway between Bunny and me in age. Mary Frances went to a Catholic girls' school, and she used to regale us with stories about the nuns--Sister Mary so-and-so, and Sister Mary so-and-so, and Sister Mary something or other. She said that if the girls were chewing gum the nun would make them spit it out and she'd rub it in their hair. I was horrified. I thought, "Thank goodness I don't have to go to that school!" The Rileys were our close friends, we saw them a lot.

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M. Foster: Des Moines had a college--does still--Drake University, and when my parents moved to Des Moines my father had gone around to Drake University to his fraternity house--because the fraternities were all national and had chapters at Northwestern and at Drake--and he got acquainted with several people that way, and one of them, Bill Riley, was his close friend. I think Fred Moore, the doctor, pediatrician, baby doctor who lived next door to us, was in my father's fraternity too.

My father was an atheist, and Bill Riley was a very good Catholic, and my father teased his Catholic friends about their religion a lot, but these people had a good sense of humor and so did he. It wasn't nasty teasing, it was just jokey. Another of our family friends were Jewish--the Frankels. They were the most artistic family; the mother and daughter were named Margo and they, both Margos, did a lot of art things. Margo's still living, in Santa Barbara, so we are in contact and see each other from time to time.

Actually the mother became a Christian Scientist because she had had a good, very close friend who was a Christian Scientist. So the children were brought up as Christian Scientists, although the father wasn't a Christian Scientist. Margo came from a Jewish family that had houses on 37th Street, the street that my grandparents lived on, beautiful houses and beautiful gardens.

Riess: I'm surprised that your parents' house only had one bathroom.

M. Foster: That was very common in that era.

My parents house was a really nice house built by an architect. It had a sleeping porch where we all slept. You know those were the days when sleeping porches were the health thing, so you slept with lots of air, in open, screened sleeping porches. My parents also had a room, dressing room, like a bedroom only they didn't sleep in it. Bunny and I had a playroom, but we didn't sleep in it. And we had a guest room downstairs.

The downstairs guest room just had a lavatory, a sink and a toilet, it didn't have a bath. And then there was the maid's room, and another room that when--I can't remember how old we were, but Bunny and I were moved out of our playroom into this other bigger room, which had twin beds. Bunny used to get mad at me because I filed my clothes on the bed [laughs]. We had a closet but I didn't hang them up. I said, "It's much more convenient because I can see them there, I can pick out what I want."

Riess: So on the sleeping porch how were you all organized?

M. Foster: We were lined up in a row. My father was so tall--he was six feet four--he and my mother had a brass bed that was extra long. They were at one end of the sleeping porch, and my bed was next. In the beginning I had a child's bed, youth bed, and Bunny had a crib, a brass crib, and I've never understood why

she wasn't moved into this child's bed that had been my mother's childhood bed. Why wasn't I put in the crib?

After a while, my mother decided to get herself a twin bed, because my father was so big that he took up a lot of space. So then my mother had a bed just like the ones Bunny and I had, and we had our three beds in a row, and I was next to my mother, and Bunny was at the end right next to the door that led into our play room.

I read something the other day referring to sleeping porches, the fad to have sleeping porches. I have thought about it since. My parents had no privacy, and I wasn't aware of sex. I didn't think anything about it, but Bunny told me that she used to wake up and wonder what was going on [laughs]. I guess they weren't inhibited by us--but I guess I was just always asleep. I wouldn't have wanted to have my growing children in my bedroom.

We grew up with very rigid bedtimes always. We had the hour when we went to bed--like 8:00 and then maybe moved to 8:30, something like that. Ultimately it was 9:00--but it was rigid. We also took naps when we were little, and I think naps are a good idea because it gives the mother a little bit of time to herself.

Riess: Did you continue this practice with your own children?

M. Foster: Yes. George and I were both brought up with bedtimes, and it was just sort of automatic with us. I still think it's a good idea. George in his oral history said something about that, that he thought it better not to. Well, in Mexico children just fall asleep wherever they are, and they get carried to bed after a while. But I think children really like to have rules. I think it's good training to have certain things that you do, and you know are expected of you. That part of it I really think was good.

Views of a Writing Life

M. Foster: Let's see, I talked about the churchgoing friends, and I was going to talk about the literary friends. When I was a little bit older my parents formed a group that called themselves "The Intelligentsia"--I told you about them. They were all interested in books and writing, and these friends were writers. One of them was Gladys Denny Shultz, who became the

editor of *Ladies' Home Journal*. One of them was MacKinlay Kantor, who was a very well known Iowa writer. Others were not particularly known for their writing but did write.

Riess: Was *Ladies' Home Journal* any part of the Cowles empire?

M. Foster: No.

Victor Shultz, Gladys Denny Shultz's husband, was sort of a literary guru to some high school boys that I knew. They would spend time with Victor Shultz. They were a group of boys that considered themselves that age intelligentsia. Bunny and I never considered our friends the intelligentsia, but our friends were bookish.

Riess: Just what did your father do at the newspaper?

M. Foster: My father did a lot of different jobs on the newspaper, but in his final years with the paper he was just writing editorials.

Riess: Did he like that work?

M. Foster: Yes. I think so. I think he was a very curious person. Curious in an intellectual sense, and interested in most everything. I thought that he should have been a travel writer or something like that. If he'd written for the *National Geographic*, for example, he would have been marvelous. I thought it wasn't terribly good for him to go to work for his father-in-law. They were very different.

Riess: When did you start thinking things like that?

M. Foster: I think it was quite a bit later. I don't remember thinking that in my childhood. My father gave up what he was doing in Wyoming and came back to Des Moines because my mother wanted to come back home, and she was homesick. His father-in-law offered him a job, which he took. They respected each other, but they were never very close. My father was much closer to my grandmother--more like my grandmother in his interests.

Riess: Being in the newspaper world were you automatically privy to the famous people who came through town?

M. Foster: Not automatically, but some people did come through the town. Aimee Semple McPherson, for example, came when I was twelve or thirteen and going through a stage where I was reading every murder mystery. You know, my mother got all these books from the publishing companies, and she would shelve things according

to categories, so she had a bookcase that had lots of murder mysteries and I read myself through these murder mysteries.

I remember we went down early to get a seat in the big auditorium place to hear Aimee Semple McPherson. And I took along *The Green Murder Case*. It had a kind of a garish cover, and I thought, "These people are all religious--should I be reading *The Green Murder Case*?" But we had to sit and wait, and I always had to have something to read. Both Bunny and I did. We read cereal boxes or anything that came our way, just because we couldn't live without reading, and so we took books everywhere.

People got converted. Aimee Semple McPherson was a very dynamic preacher.

Riess: Was it at all compelling for you?

M. Foster: Oh not in the slightest. It was like a social phenomenon. I was terribly interested in how people were responding.

Riess: You said Henry Wallace's parents lived next door to your grandparents?

M. Foster: Yes, the senior Wallaces--and she was always called Mother Wallace. My grandmother hated to be called Mother Cowles, but they were the same age.

The Wallaces had a magazine called *Wallace's Farmer*, and Henry Wallace did all this experimenting with developing better plants, corn. Strawberries, I remember, was one thing he experimented with a lot. He had a very curious mind, like my father, and they became exceedingly good friends. So we saw the Wallaces too, I guess, on picnics and things like that.
[tape interruption]

Riess: Would you say you had grown up around liberated women?

M. Foster: I don't think anybody thought in those terms.

Riess: What kind of a message did you get from your mother about marriage and/or career?

M. Foster: Oh, marriage, very much so. We should certainly marry and have children. I think she was worried for fear we wouldn't marry the right boys.

Dad didn't want us to get married. He was very upset when Bunny announced that she was engaged and going to get

married, and the same with me. We three women were his "harem," as I've said.

Riess: It was his loss that you were getting married?

M. Foster: Oh, yes. He didn't like change.

Riess: Was he supportive of your being an anthropologist?

M. Foster: He was terribly enthusiastic about my selecting anthropology as what I wanted to do. The travel, plus the adventures, and he would have adored that. But maybe the idea of being attached to some other man was--I think he had kind of a jealous streak or something.

Riess: Let's get to the first trip your family took to France and how that came about.

M. Foster: I should say though, before we get into that, that I didn't like school. It didn't occur to me I didn't like school, but I've talked to friends since who say, "Oh, I just adored school." School is kind of a gray area for me. I went but there was nothing interesting or exciting to me about school.

Riess: Were you a good student?

M. Foster: I was a terribly good student in grade school because I could read and write so well. But I never was terribly good at arithmetic, and I skipped the multiplication tables, which didn't help me in further math. There were two or three courses I liked in high school. I liked both algebra and geometry, and I had good teachers. I had one English teacher that I liked a lot, but other than that, I didn't really warm up to them.

Riess: In high school did you begin to think about what you would be?

M. Foster: What I always thought I would be--I thought this from the time I first learned to read--was I would write children's books, because I didn't think most children's books were very good. And I thought, I will always remember what children like--and I do! See, I never grew up [laughs]. I didn't write children's books, but I was certain for a long time that's what I would do.

Riess: Did you make up stories with your own children?

M. Foster: A little, but not much. I got bored with the stories if I got in a kind of a serial thing. I got into something with Melissa

about a mouse called Marvin, and I got bored with Marvin. Melissa adored Marvin, and she always wanted me to go on telling stories, but basically I was not half as good a storyteller as my dad. My dad could dream up all kinds of screwball things.

Living in France, Travels

Riess: Now, what was the impetus for the trip to France, Mickie?

M. Foster: The impetus for the trip to France, I suppose, started with the fact that we studied French as a family.

Riess: And the impetus for that?

M. Foster: My father liked languages, and he taught himself from records, Victrola records and books.

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M. Foster: When we were much younger Bunny and I decided to learn French from the *Book of Knowledge*. We memorized some of the phrases so that we could impress our parents, and the phrase that we always remembered that we recited to our parents was, "Jay mappleay Lewis et Jay Dick's Anns." Which is, "Je m'appelle Louis et j'ai dix ans." "My name is Louis, and I'm ten years old." We didn't have any idea that it would be pronounced differently from English! [laughter]

The *Book of Knowledge* has all sorts of things that you could learn. I think I probably got more out of the *Book of Knowledge* than I did out of school. That was our introduction to French. Then for several years Mademoiselle Baridon came to dinner on Tuesday nights, and we all spoke French with dinner and had our French lesson afterward.

It must have started when I was eleven, because the summer that I was eleven we took a camping trip east, our only eastern camping trip, and we went up through New England into Canada, and I remember when we were in Quebec my mother had to go to the grocery store to buy supplies, and she had to use her French. But mostly she avoided having to use French, she never got very fluent. When Bunny and I went later to live in France we could get along, we didn't have to start from scratch.

In 1929, the year I was fifteen, we went to Europe for the summer. We took a boat from Montreal. We landed in Glasgow, and began touring through Scotland and England, and down across the Channel into France and Belgium--sort of a grand tour. We didn't get to Spain, and we just got to northern Italy, I think. (I get the trips mixed up, because we spent two years after that doing a lot of travel, besides being in schools first in Switzerland and then in France.)

Riess: Was it wrenching for you to be pulled out of school?

M. Foster: When we went over the next year, when I was sixteen, yes, that was wrenching. Because we were involved with boys and high school things, not so much the events at high school but parties and things, groups of people that we were involved with.

We went back and forth to Europe on small boats, and the trip when I was sixteen, going over, there was a Belgian prince on the boat, and he sort of fell for me--it was quite exciting, and we had kind of a little romance. But my twin cousins were also on board. They were going to Europe for the year with their parents, and they were twelve years old. And Betsy--they were Gardie and Betsy--Betsy followed the prince and me. Every time we'd try to get off some place, right there behind us was Betsy, and a little red-headed boy that was their age that was on the boat too.

The boat coming back was a German boat, and all the young officers socialized with the passengers, so we had lots of young men that were interested in us. The boats were great fun! Then, of course, when we got to Europe everything was so new and different. We enjoyed everything.

Riess: Bunny told a story in her oral history about scarlet fever and quarantine when you were living in France in 1931.

M. Foster: Yes, it was interesting to me because lots of things she said about it weren't true. [laughs] (But we haven't talked here about Switzerland and Les Hêtres, the school we went to in the hills above Lausanne--we only were there for one semester.¹)

When we were in France we were living in Grenoble with French families, different families, and we were attending classes at the university. Bunny came down with scarlet fever,

¹For more on this trip to Europe see Jurs, *op cit.*, Chapter II, "Sojourn in Europe."

and the father of the family would sit in her room and read to her. She didn't say that, but he did, and it was through him that the little boy in the family got scarlet fever; the father passed it along to his child.

Also, Bunny was not quarantined. She said she was, but she was not. I came every day, and I would come in the house, and I would stand in the hall. Her room was on the ground floor, and I'd come in. She said she talked to me through the window, but she didn't. She said she was quarantined, but I know I'm right because I was the one who had to come to see her. And my feeling all through it was that this was terrible because she wasn't quarantined. The doctor sprinkled eucalyptus oil outside her bedroom door and we would talk from hall to bedroom.

In Des Moines Bunny had had what they diagnosed as scarlet fever, and the house was quarantined. We were little kids. I was allowed to keep on going to school, but I was moved to my grandmother's, and I don't think anybody else caught it. But it can't have been scarlet fever, because she definitely had scarlet fever in France, so it must have been what's called "scarlatina." Very similar, but not as life-threatening.

But this scarlet fever thing was very bad. I arranged for her to get out of the house, because the father had gotten it and died, and I arranged through my French boyfriend and his family to have her moved to the "pest" hospital--I think it was called something like that--the hospital for people with contagious diseases. I was having to be very responsible for what happened to her, so I remember that is how it was. She remembered it wrong.

It was terrible--in Grenoble that winter, every time you went out there was a funeral cortège.

Riess: Because of scarlet fever?

M. Foster: No, no. Just in general. So many people died. I don't know what they died of. I'm sure it wasn't scarlet fever. But it was kind of lugubrious, and French women in those days went into mourning if a second cousin died, or anybody died. They almost spent most of their youth in black clothing.

I was in a family with an older boy and three sisters, but they were actually two families because the father and mother had each been married before and had two children. The boy went off--this was the second year we were there, he was at

home the first year I was there--he went off to the army to do his military training, and he got spinal meningitis in the military and died.

It was awful--I wrote a short story about it for a class at college. The girls were very chaperoned, they were not allowed to go out and do things by themselves, but their mother let them go to the movies with me in the daytime. We went downtown, and we were trying to decide what movies to go to, and there was a movie called "*La Chienne*"--"The Bitch"--and it obviously was going to be kind of a movie that the mother wouldn't have approved of, but one of the girls said that's the movie she wanted to see. The other girls said that they wanted to go to something else, and I did too, so we separated and went to different movies. The girl that went to *La Chienne* was Suze, the sister of the brother who--but we didn't know--he was just in the army.

We came home from the movie and got to the house, and the mother met us as we came in the door and said that he had died, and, of course, we were all just shaken. Another girl that was boarding there too--she wasn't with us on that excursion but she lived there, and she and I had adjoining rooms--she and I said to the mother that we would move out. We felt as if we shouldn't be there. But the mother wouldn't hear of it, so we stayed.

Suze, who'd gone to this "*The Bitch*" movie, felt so guilty, almost as if because she'd done something that her parents wouldn't have liked that she somehow had brought on the death. It was really awful.

Riess: What did you learn from living with this family?

M. Foster: Well, the girls were brought up completely differently than I was. I loved the girls, we got along just fine together, and the mother accepted the fact that I was an American liberated girl, so I could go out on dates, or I could do what I wanted to. I wasn't restricted, but her girls had to be chaperoned everywhere.

Interestingly, there were dances, balls in town where everybody paid to go. The parents went, and the teenage kids went, and the parents would sit along the sidelines and be chaperones while the girls danced with boys. Suze, the oldest daughter in the family, had gotten engaged to a boy that she'd met by going to the dance--that seemed to be the only way they met boys.

And that was another thing. Her fiancé was studying in Paris, and she'd written to him about her brother dying, and he wrote back to her, sending all these sympathetic messages to the family. She had to show the letters to her mother and father--it was her step-mother and her father--and they were addressing each other with the familiar tu instead of the formal vous. This was shocking--you weren't supposed to until you were married, if even then.

Yvette, the next daughter, got married while I was there toward the end of that spring. That was another interesting thing, that these girls could go on ski excursions with a group of young men without any chaperone. I asked them about it, and they said that was different--it was *pour le sport*. It was okay to go off to the mountains by yourself with this group of men, quite a bit older than the girls. Yvette married one of them. The third daughter married the younger brother of the boy that her step-sister had married.

Riess: You were in your observer mode when you were living there.

M. Foster: I'm always in my observer mode. If you're an anthropologist, and you go to the field, the things that strike you are the things that are different. I began having a chance to observe cultural differences when I was sixteen years old.² But I wasn't consciously doing it.

Riess: Were you writing home during this time?

M. Foster: Yes. I don't know what happened to my letters.³ My mother never kept anything. Well, that's not true, because when George and I were first married we were in Vienna at the time of the Anschluss when Hitler and his cohorts came in, and my mother kept all those letters. Actually she turned them over to the newspaper, so they were all published.

Riess: Yes, well that's probably the difference.

M. Foster: Yes, it was historical. I don't think she would have saved any family letters back and forth, which is too bad because that is

²Actually, when I went off at age twelve to camp in New Hampshire, where most girls were easterners with quite different customs than those of Iowa, that was a purposeful move on our parents' part; they were deliberately giving us a different cultural experience. MF

³I have since discovered that my mother had saved some of these letters. And eventually they will be in The Bancroft Library. MF

what's so marvelous about this bunch of letters that were just retrieved: they have the family history for 150 years or more.

Riess: Did you have a boyfriend in Grenoble that it was hard to leave?

M. Foster: Oh, you never expected to keep the same boyfriend, you always knew it was temporary.

But my sister fell very much in love. We went to Vienna after that, at the end of the second year, for about three months or four months, and she fell madly in love with this boy--well, he must have been at least two years, maybe three years older than she. We went to a dance, and we met him and his best friend, and those were the two male escorts that we had from then on.

Riess: Had you read the novels of Henry James?

M. Foster: Not until later in college when I took this marvelous course where I read *The Ambassadors*, and I thought, "This is the best book I ever read."

Riess: I asked that because I wondered if you and your sister would have been viewed in Europe as heiresses.

M. Foster: Well, it's possible that we were, but I don't think so--our parents were not wealthy.

Riess: You and Bunny were so close. Can you remember some important moments when you had a sure sense of being differentiated?

M. Foster: I always saw myself as thinking about things differently from other people. I think I always knew it in some sense, but I didn't know it was valuable.

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M. Foster: Those two years abroad were just marvelous for me. I didn't have to go to class and do things, you know, produce stuff. I just was learning about being there. We went to lectures. They had large lectures for foreign students on different topics, French history, literature, all kinds of things. We were enrolled, but we didn't have to do anything.

At the end of two years I don't know that I was necessarily expected to take the exam--Bunny was in the hospital with scarlet fever, so she didn't take the exam--but I took the exam and I flunked it. So that shows that I was not really paying too much attention. I think my French was pretty

good by then because most of my friends were French, and I was having to speak French all the time. That's what mattered to me, and the social scene that I was interested in, but I don't think I really absorbed very much knowledge. If I did, it was very superficial.

The English girl--actually she was from Poland, but she was basically English--who was living with my French family, she flunked the exam too. It was obviously a difficult exam. It didn't occur to me I'd flunk it. Then when I went to Northwestern they gave me some stuff to translate, to see what my French was like, which I passed okay and got entry credit for. I took advanced French literature courses in college.

Parents in Washington, The New Deal, Wallace

Riess: In 1933, the New Deal years, your parents moved to Washington, and your father worked with Henry Wallace.

M. Foster: Oh, my father was in seventh heaven. At last the world was going to be a good place. Roosevelt was solving all the problems, and the Democrats were going to prevail.

You see, I had grown up with a very liberal background. I think Iowa was considered to be a rather conservative place, but actually my parents' friends were all liberals--I really didn't know conservatives very much except for my grandparents and the arguments at the family dinner table. My friends mostly had liberal parents too. So I don't see Des Moines as a stuffy place or an unintellectual place, I really think of it as quite an intellectual bastion.

Riess: What do you remember about New Deal Washington?⁴

M. Foster: Henry Wallace, as I've said, was an old family friend--we'd known him from way back. I think he probably liked my father better than any of the rest of his friends. They really had the same kind of minds, and tremendous intellectual curiosity. But Henry Wallace got kind of put down for that.

You know, they said he had a guru and stuff--well, he was interested in Eastern religions as an intellectual challenge.

⁴All of this seems extraneous to me and not anything I would have thought or talked about without questioning. MF

He really didn't have a guru, you know, but he got ridiculed so much--a little bit like Jerry Brown in California. But with my father he could talk about all these subjects that he probably couldn't talk about to everybody. He was really well ahead of his time.

My father was in his office working with him all the time, and they were also taking noon walks together, throwing boomerangs together in the park.

Riess: Was your father's job for Wallace on the writing end?

M. Foster: To some extent I suppose. But he was mixed up in everything that went on in the Department of Agriculture, in policy and all sorts of ways.

His other close friend, Paul Appleby, was Assistant Secretary of Agriculture. My father was an Assistant Secretary. I think there were actually two assistants, and I can't think who the other one was, but Paul Appleby was one and Paul Appleby was also an Iowa boy, a good friend of Henry Wallace and my parents. So these families, the Applebys and the Wallaces and the LeCrons all did all kinds of things together. The children all knew each other very well.

Riess: Would you characterize these men as idealists?

M. Foster: They were practical idealists. Henry Wallace was very innovative, and yes, an idealist in the best sense of the word, I think.

Riess: And at the end of the experience were they still idealists?

M. Foster: Oh, yes. Oh my, yes.

Riess: They felt that they had been able to be effective.

M. Foster: I'm sure they did. Yes. Of course Henry Wallace ran for president and was not elected.

Riess: Did your father work on that campaign?

M. Foster: I don't really remember, but he was certainly very much in favor of Henry, always. He was Henry's most loyal friend. Paul Appleby actually did not support Henry for president, which was kind of strange--and also annoying to my dad who was nothing if not persistently loyal.

My parents talked all the time about all the people that they were seeing and knowing, and what their opinions were and so on. But the inner circle certainly was the Applebys, Wallaces. And there were a few other people certainly who were their good friends. I remember Dwight Eisenhower's brother Milton who was a college professor, who was always said by my parents' intellectual friends to be "the smart Eisenhower." And I knew him.

I knew a lot of people, but not intimately. That's something Bunny wouldn't have talked about in her oral history, because Bunny was at Stanford. I was at Northwestern, so I was going back and forth just by an overnight train to Washington.

Riess: Any other recollections of your parents in Washington?

M. Foster: [laughs] Well, the funniest one was when my mother went to a luncheon at the White House--I think it was the only luncheon she went to at the White House, actually. She was invited by Mrs. Roosevelt, and I think there might have been a dozen women, or something like that. Anyway, she said the maid came in with a plate full of biscuits, and she looked at the plate, and here were twelve women, and there were twelve biscuits, so when it came around to her, she took two [laughs]. She said she did it to see what would happen! How thrown they would be!

She said she talked to Mrs. Roosevelt about their grandchildren, because my son Jeremy and Mrs. Roosevelt's grandson Buzz, or something, were the same age. They compared notes on their grandchildren. She admired Mrs. Roosevelt a great deal. So did I.⁵

⁵How did we get to Washington before I had talked about the difficult transition from Europe to the U.S., from Grenoble to Evanston, Illinois? The leap to college was a big intellectual and social transition. College meant sororities and a different social scene, new and lasting friendships. College was very formative. Somehow it has been neglected in favor of Washington, which was insignificant in comparison. MF



Mickie (Mary) LeCron, and next to her Julie Tanner, studying for exams at Northwestern University, 1935. Above, Melville J. Herskovits, 1935. Photographs by George Foster.

V LAUNCHED

Anthropology and Melville Herskovits

M. Foster: I was thrilled by college because you didn't have to recite--you had to write term papers. I loved writing term papers, I loved any kind of analytic writing, I knew I was good at that and so I sailed through, even though when I first arrived at Northwestern I had absolutely no idea of my skills or abilities. I didn't know whether I could make it or not.

Riess: You started out in French?

M. Foster: Yes, I started taking a lot of advanced French courses, literature courses. I sort of fell into anthropology because I thought I'd signed up for a French literature course, and it turned out that I'd been looking at the catalog wrong, it was the other semester. I discovered I signed up for something that didn't exist, so I switched to this anthropology course.

Riess: Had anyone told you it was good?

M. Foster: Yes, oh, yes. I'd had friends who'd taken it, thought it was wonderful. That was real epiphany--discovering anthropology.

Riess: Had you taken any other social studies classes?

M. Foster: I took a sociology class which was horrible. And psychology I took my sophomore year, I guess at the same time that I took the anthropology. I didn't like psychology.

Riess: The anthropology was in your sophomore year?

M. Foster: Yes. You weren't supposed to take it until your junior year, but I couldn't see how anybody could major in it if they couldn't take it until their junior year. So I either sneaked in, or I got special permission or something--a waiver so that

I could take this course, which meant that my next two years I could take almost nothing but anthropology.

Riess: Who else was teaching anthropology besides Melville Herskovits?

M. Foster: Nobody. It was a sociology/anthropology department, and Herskovits was the only anthropologist until my senior year when a young anthropologist named Willard [Z.] Park joined the department, and I had a course or two from him.

My junior year, when George and I were majoring in it together, that's when we began being acquainted. In the introductory course, we didn't know each other, although he always claimed he noticed me, but I'm sure he didn't [laughs]. Anyway, there were, I think, about sixty people in the class, and four people got A's, and two of them were George and me. So, if you both like it and do well then you are inclined to keep on with it.

Herskovits was a wonderful teacher, just wonderful, and it came to me in that introductory course that anthropology was made for me. It was interested in the way people lived and what they did, and differences between cultures, and I thought, "Gosh, can you really study this?!"

Riess: The systematic aspects of it were appealing?

M. Foster: Yes, and that was actually something I meant to say about my mother. My mother was very interested in organization and order, and my father wasn't particularly. My father had his very curious mind. He was interested in all sorts of different facets of things, but he wasn't organized the way my mother was. Bunny rebelled so much against this. Our mother would label our dresser drawers, with Socks, and Underwear, and Bunny would rip them out. It made her so angry. I didn't care if they were labelled or not, it didn't matter to me, I wasn't very orderly anyway. Strangely, in later life Bunny was as organized as our mother, even labelling dresser drawers, her daughters tell me!

Riess: Tell me about the classes you had.

M. Foster: I took economic anthropology, I took religious anthropology. I didn't take any linguistics until I was in graduate school-- which wasn't really linguistics at that point, it was a course called language. I took a course on folklore.

Herskovits had worked in Africa. He was innovative in that he was the first person to explore the relationship

between African culture and New World black culture. This was awfully interesting--and it is still awfully interesting. We went to a lecture last night by a black professor at Stanford who was talking about "ebonics," the linguistic thing, which follows in a way what Herskovits was interested in, the relationship between black languages in Africa and American black dialects. I took every anthropology course that was given.

My friend Julie and I took all those courses. Julie was my closest college friend, and she did the same thing I did and followed through with anthropology. I remember when we went to register for our majors the next year. Registration was in the gym, and the chairmen of the departments sat at tables and talked to and registered the people for their particular field. We decided we'd major in anthropology--she was just as enthusiastic as I was--but we discovered that Herskovits wasn't there. We said, "Where is Professor Herskovits." And they said, "Oh, he's supposed to be here. He's been in Africa all summer, and he'll be back. He'll come."

We waited and waited. Julie kept saying, "If he isn't here in half an hour, I'm going to go major in English"--because she also had planned earlier to major in English--and I said, "I won't, I'm going to wait." So she'd said she'd wait. And then she'd say, "Well, if he's not here in fifteen minutes." It kept going on like that for quite a while until finally he did come. I was determined that I was going to major in anthropology. I think Julie could have gone either way, but she majored in anthropology too. So here was George, and Julie, and I, and I think there were two other majors.

Riess: When you declared that you were a major, were you under his wing?

M. Foster: Oh, he was just so nice to us. He was always inviting us to his house when some visiting anthropologists would come, and we'd sit at their feet and listen to the great men argue.

Riess: Who were the visiting great men?

M. Foster: I don't know. Malinowski, I remember.

Riess: Did he direct you in your career?

M. Foster: He tried to get us to go to Wisconsin, or he tried to get me to go to Wisconsin--George was determined to go to California right from the beginning--but Julie and I were determined to go to New York. Boas was a big attraction. Boas had retired, but

he was alive. We'd go to his house sometimes. But we didn't have any really close contact with Boas. Ruth Benedict, yes. Margaret Mead was in the field then. And she never taught anthropology anyway, she was at the museum.

Riess: Did Herskovits want you to work in Africa?

M. Foster: No, but Zora Neale Hurston, who was a black dancer, and writer, she came and we met her. I'm trying to think who else we met.

Herskovits forced us to take honors degrees, which I was scared to take because you had to take comprehensive exams and an oral exam, and it was almost like a Ph.D. exam. Not that rigorous, but it was the same kind of thing. I wouldn't have done it if he hadn't forced me into it. So he had faith in us. If somebody really has faith in you, you're apt to begin to believe them.

Riess: Later you met Kroeber and Lowie, who were also such forceful and influential teachers.

M. Foster: I went to Columbia for a year, and then I dropped out and went to California in the summer and stayed. George and I renewed our relationship while I was out there, and we were married in January. So let's say I had a year-and-a-half of graduate anthropology.

When I got to Cal I was too late to register, so I just audited that semester without getting back into it as an authentic graduate student. I met Lowie--actually, Lowie was on leave. I've forgotten where he went, but he and his wife went off some place and invited George and two other people to live in their house. One was Alfred Metraux, an anthropologist from France who was a visiting professor. So George and Demitri Shimkin, another graduate student, and Alfred Metraux had rooms in the house.

Riess: Before we get very far into that, I was just wondering if you had a response to Lowie or to Kroeber that was powerful, like your response to Herskovits.

M. Foster: I didn't know them that well at that time. I got to know Herskovits very well, so later on when I was in anthropology and going to meetings and things, Herskovits always took a very paternal interest in George and me. He thought he made our marriage, you see. We were his two students who married each other, and he took great pride in that. He followed what we were doing very closely. And he was the only professor that I had who did that.

Longer Range Plans

[Interview 5: February 8, 2000] ##

M. Foster: Anthropology was a field that nobody knew anything about, you know. I never had even heard of it until I got to college. And then I only heard of it because I had a couple of friends who'd taken this course and liked it. I had no idea what it was all about [laughs]. I've found since then that most people don't. Most people think it's bones or something. Sometimes they think it's archaeology; they think of it as something historical or evolutionary. They don't think of it as people's lives--contemporary stuff. Herskovits had spent a lot of time in the field just living with the people, studying the people, so to me that's what it was. I never did take any archaeology.

Riess: When you got into anthropology--I think you've answered this--were you thinking about becoming an anthropologist in the sense of going off into the field?

M. Foster: I hadn't gotten that far. I don't think I thought about it, except that I knew I wanted to get married and I wanted to have children. I hadn't thought through trying to combine the two.

When I was out here in Berkeley that semester before we got married I began thinking that it was going to be very difficult to be married. Alfred Metraux, who was living in Lowie's house, just as George was, had gotten a divorce, or his wife had, because they had a child and they couldn't take the child to the field, and Alfred had to be away so much. So he warned me that you can't be married. He did ultimately remarry and have another child by another woman, Rhoda Metraux, but she either became an anthropologist or was already a semi-anthropologist. She got to be Margaret Mead's best friend. I don't know anything about her education or her degree.

Riess: Going to Columbia, was that to get a master's?

M. Foster: No, a Ph.D. People mostly in those days didn't bother with a master's. They just went on ahead for their Ph.D. I always felt that you couldn't really get a job in anthropology with a master's degree. I don't know. I think in general, people just do start on their Ph.D.

Riess: What were you planning then?

M. Foster: I don't suppose I was really planning. I was just interested in it and wanted to pursue it. I suppose I probably felt at

some point along the way I would fall in love with somebody and either be an anthropologist or not, in which case I would have to deviate from being an anthropologist. I really hadn't thought it through, I guess I wasn't a very good planner. My mother was a big planner, so maybe I was rejecting being a planner. I think that's possible.

My father loved the fact that I was studying anthropology. It was more a field that would appeal to my father than to my mother because he loved travel. He loved the *National Geographic*, which was probably all he knew about primitive people. It seemed to him an exciting life--but he didn't want me to get married, you see. My mother always wanted us to get married. So that's kind of strange.

Riess: Please tell me about Ruth Benedict at Columbia.

M. Foster: I can't tell you much about Ruth Benedict except that she was nominally my advisor. She scared me so that I didn't really talk to her a great deal. She was quite deaf and very tall and sort of austere looking. Handsome. She wasn't easy to talk to, and I was so shy I didn't start conversations with people if they didn't talk to me.

I could talk to people if I could get started, but I couldn't seek people out and say, "Oh, I just want so much to talk to you about such and such because I think it's so interesting." That kind of thing. I never could initiate conversation, so I just went to my classes, and I took notes, absorbed what the professor said, read the readings.

Riess: Do you think that she had a negative effect on your aspirations in any way?

M. Foster: Well, I didn't awfully want to go back.

Riess: Was the New York year good? How serious a student were you?

M. Foster: I was a serious student. I was very seriously interested in anthropology.

It was fun being in New York because it was a completely different environment. There were theaters, and if our parents came to town they'd get us good seats for good plays. I was rooming with Joey; she and I took an apartment together, and she was going to art school studying design.

I didn't say that in Des Moines Joey and I had taken a course in charcoal drawing on Saturday mornings, and we were

about equally good at it. We both enjoyed it. It was an art school called the Cummings Art School, and they had painting classes. I would have given my eyeteeth to take a painting class, but I never asked my parents for anything. I've forgotten how I happened to get into the charcoal class, probably my father thought I would like it. I always drew. Maybe after I got over thinking I was going to write children's books I thought I might be an illustrator--another interest I had.

Riess: You never asked for anything?

M. Foster: I've often wondered why I didn't, I just didn't. I wanted a doll house all my childhood, and I never mentioned it. Bunny knew about it, and that's why she had a doll house made for me later in life--I'll have to show you my doll house.

Courtship

M. Foster: My sister and brother-in-law had been living outside of New York while I was at Columbia. Then they moved back to California--Gene was from Oakland--because he was with his father's firm, and when he was in New York he was in the business end, in sales--not the manufacturing end, his brother Pete was that. Gene was learning about the eastern sales end when he was in New York, but I don't think he ever intended to stay in New York.

They went back to California, and I came out to the West Coast to go on a pack-horse trip with my father. I had gone on another such trip with my father, and with my sister, a couple of years before, to the Wind River Range in Wyoming, and it was wonderful. My father wanted to take another pack trip and wanted me to go, and I loved that sort of life, so we planned to go into the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State. We came out west for that, and then we were going to come down to Oakland to see my sister.

But in the meantime, George and I had had a romance at Northwestern and broken up. George barely alludes to this in his oral history, he hates to talk about it. It was my senior year at Northwestern, and he was in graduate school in California. He went home for Christmas, 1935, and decided that he wanted to marry a girl that he'd gone to high school with. She was the minister's daughter, and a very nice girl, I am sure. His girlfriend--she hadn't really been his girlfriend

until he went back for that Christmas, she was just one of the crowd he went around with. I met her later, but obviously I didn't know her at the time.

I've often pondered why he broke up with me. I kind of hesitate to say this because I don't know whether he'd agree or not, but the way that I've always seen it was that our backgrounds were different enough--in a way socially they were pretty similar, but as far as belief systems they were quite different. He came from a good staunch Republican background, and this was the New Deal, and if you didn't live through the New Deal, which you didn't, you didn't know how controversial it was, and how it was hated by the Republicans.

My father was in Washington with the New Deal, and for George's father, who was a meat packer, Henry Wallace was absolute anathema because he was doing what got called by the media, "plowing the little pigs under." He was getting farmers to not raise so many pigs. Being a meat packer, this was pretty awful for George's father. To have our fathers have such completely different political views was a difficult thing.

Then George had been brought up as a good Presbyterian. I had been brought up in a completely unreligious atmosphere. George's relatives were all off being missionaries--not all, but two or three of them, there was a missionary strain. I thought, and this was reinforced by anthropology, that missionaries were destroying people's way of life, and I didn't believe in missionaries. George came to think that too, later, but at that time he was working his way out from under a whole series of beliefs.

We would argue about all this, but when we were at Northwestern it didn't seem to matter so much, except that it was there all the time. I suppose in a sense it maybe limited the things we talked about. At least we knew where the other one stood--on the other side of the fence!--in these respects. But George--he might not have admitted, or he may not have ever recognized it, but I think that he felt that I was the wrong kind of wife.

Riess: For him or for his family?

M. Foster: Well, for his family, and he was very much a child of his family. He had a loving family, and actually his family--I had been to visit him in his home in Iowa. He had been to visit me at the end of that year, which was his senior year. Our way of

life was not particularly different, except they went to church and we didn't.

Maybe one thing that made me okay was my grandfather was the publisher of the Des Moines paper, which was read all over Iowa, so this was pretty respectable. My grandfather was a good Republican. But the *Register and Tribune* had columnists on every side of everything. They believed strongly that they should represent all kinds of political views, not just the Republican, in the paper. I think as far as George's family was concerned I was okay, I came from a good family, in the economic and social sense, I guess.

To return to the narrative, Cal had completely different semester dates, and so that meant that after the 1935 Christmas holiday he didn't have to go back to school as soon as I did. So he came to Evanston to see me. I should say that in the meantime we'd broken up by mail. He told me that he'd gotten himself engaged. This was a big shock.

Riess: You two hadn't really talked about yourselves as a team? That wasn't something that was keeping you together?

M. Foster: No, I don't think so. It might have kept me together, but I don't think it kept him together! [laughs] So what happened was he got engaged, and then he went back to Berkeley to graduate school. He was engaged all that spring. They had set the wedding for August, probably--she was at Swarthmore, and so he wasn't seeing her then either. I didn't hear from him after that episode in Evanston at Christmas.

My parents decided that they wanted to take me on a cruise up the North Cape in Norway for my graduation present. So we went to Europe and we did that. Then later in the fall, a friend told me that George's wedding had been called off. Well, it didn't surprise me. And obviously I thought, "Oh, good, he didn't get married after all." I'd had a very hard time believing he was going to get married.

That fall, 1936, Julie and I went together to Columbia to begin graduate work in anthropology, and George was back in Berkeley beginning his second graduate year. That Christmas George had five weeks of vacation between semesters, and he decided to go to Mexico during that time. George had gone to Japan by himself before, he was good at traveling by himself. So he went to Mexico for Christmas, and he must have written to me that he wasn't getting married, because after Christmas he sent me a bunch of presents from his trip to Mexico. Then we started writing back and forth about our graduate work and so

on--anthropology--and he wrote about his experiences in Mexico, which he'd loved.

That's really why we started doing fieldwork in Mexico later, because he'd fallen in love with Mexico. Before that he and an English anthropology graduate student at Northwestern--they had talked a lot about going to Africa to do fieldwork. [tape interruption]

Marriage

M. Foster: When we came out of the mountains on the pack trip, we came down to the Bay Area, where my sister and brother-in-law were living in September 1937. I'd been writing to George all the time, and George knew I was there, and we knew we were going to see each other and so on, so it was kind of obvious that we were going to start over. I don't think we actually said that to each other, but I'm sure it was on both of our minds.

We came back out of the pack trip to a hotel--my mother had stayed in a hotel while Dad and I went off, and we came back and joined her. And I had so many letters from so many different boys! I never had been really wildly popular, but at that point I seemed to have quite a string [laughs]. Actually the one in New York knew that I was going to see George, and I think he had hopes that that would not renew itself.

Riess: How were you in the feminine wiles department?

M. Foster: Not good at all. I hated feminine wiles. I couldn't stand that kind of thing. And I wasn't good at being false.

Riess: Anyway, you stayed out here then?

M. Foster: Yes. George and I began getting back into the romantic phase.

Riess: Did you take classes when you were here?

M. Foster: Yes. I was too late to register, but I--George handled my life and got me to be an auditor in the various courses. School hadn't been going that long, you know, and I could sort of get into the groove, so the rest of that semester [fall 1937] I was there. I took a room and stayed--I didn't stay with my sister, I stayed there when I first came.

George at that point had another girlfriend [laughs]. He had been dating quite a few girls when he was at Cal, so he had all these girls, and one girl was quite in love with him. I don't think he'd made her any promises of any kind, but I think she had her hopes, so it was kind of awkward in a way.

Riess: Did you go through an engagement period?

M. Foster: No. Well, this is another kind of a peculiar thing, but George always felt--I had gone to Europe, I spoke French and I spoke some German--he hadn't done these things, and he said he was going to take the spring semester off and go to Europe because he wanted to get the same kind of background I had. So we took the train back to Chicago together from California, and in Chicago he went with his father to a jeweler and bought me an engagement ring, so we were officially engaged.

He had booked a passage on a ship out of New York on January 7th, and he was going to come and visit me in Washington before he sailed. I went on to Washington where my parents were, and he went to Ottumwa to stay with his parents. But when he came to Washington he said, "I don't want to go to Europe by myself. I'm not going to enjoy it and I'm going to miss you so much." We decided that there was really no good reason why we shouldn't get married and go to Europe together. George's parents and my mother supported us, and that swung my father in line: for obvious reasons he had been dubious about George's reliability as a son-in-law. We were married on the 6th of January, took the train to New York, and sailed the next day on the Cunard liner *Scythia*.

Riess: You didn't have the big white wedding maybe you wanted.

M. Foster: No, but I had a white satin wedding dress and a veil. George insisted that I had to have a proper wedding. We were married at home. My father got hold of the minister who was at the University of Iowa who had married my sister and asked him to come out and marry us. George's parents came. We had both pairs of parents and that was all.

Riess: And this was 1938. I have to ask whether you and George had a plan. You had been writing and talking and everything.

M. Foster: The plan was that he'd go on with his graduate work, and that I would take graduate work, and that we'd be anthropologists together.

Vienna, 1938, and Jewish Friends

M. Foster: On that trip we went first to Vienna and looked up my old friends, and we were there during the Anschluss.

Riess: What are your memories of that?

M. Foster: Oh, it was terrible. I have all sorts of memories of Nazi parades from much earlier, and I hadn't thought much about it.

I had a Jewish boyfriend in Vienna from when Bunny and I had gone to Vienna after we left Grenoble. That was the spring of thirty-two. There were Nazi parades then and--I didn't know much about Nazism, and whether people were Jewish or not Jewish didn't register with me much. I don't think I even knew that my boyfriend was Jewish, but I certainly knew it when I came back because all this Nazi thing was happening.

I looked him up, and I looked up the sister of Bunny's boyfriend--they were the people that I had known the best. My Jewish friend had a serious girlfriend--maybe they were engaged, I can't remember--but we got to be good friends with her too. And then when they--oh, it was just awful--you see we knew all these Jewish people. We knew his family and his friends.

Riess: And they didn't get out?

M. Foster: Well, my father was wonderful in helping him and his wife--his name was Hans and her name was Hansi--my father helped them get out. The parents didn't get out. It was awful. You know, you had to have a sponsor. If you could get out, if you could come to the States or get out of Germany, you had to have a sponsor, you couldn't do it otherwise. My father went to security or whatever it's called for them, on our word about it, you know, though he didn't know them.

Riess: He was doing all this back in Washington?

M. Foster: Yes. We were writing to him all the time about it.

Riess: Did you know anything about the camps?

M. Foster: I think a little bit, but not terribly much. But Jewish people had to wear the Star of David and they would be--oh, if they went into town they could be made to scrub the streets. It was terrible. And then Hans's friends were--everybody was desperate to get out, but I couldn't ask my father to help

anybody but Hans's family. I guess the parents decided not to go, but his sister left. Actually Hans had a friend in Haiti, so when he got out then he went to Haiti and got a job in Haiti. But the whole thing was just so terrible.

We woke up one morning and we heard planes overhead. The town was dead silent except that there were these planes roaring back and forth overhead, and we couldn't understand what was happening. We looked out the window and the planes were dropping leaflets, so we went out and collected some of this printed material that was being dropped. I have all of that stuff, and I wrote all of these letters home, sent my parents things that were published in the Des Moines paper. I probably still have copies that I tucked away someplace.

Riess: Did you fear at all for your own lives?

M. Foster: Oh, no. Oh, but it was so drummed into everybody--there were all these signs about vote "Ja." Why they had to have a vote--I guess they wanted to make everybody think that the people had really wanted this. But people didn't know what was really happening. Vienna was so poor and so depressed--they had a Catholic dictator and no hope for anybody, so this would be a change.

George and I had a room in an apartment run by a woman and her mother--a kind of fairly elderly woman and her more elderly mother--and we would eat one meal out, either lunch or dinner, and the other meal, and breakfast of course, with the mother and daughter. And they were very pro-Schuschnigg--the Catholic dictator--but the maid was madly in love with Hitler and went out and witnessed everything, stood on street corners, because she just adored Hitler. So the woman and her mother couldn't talk in front of the maid.

The whole experience was so--you were saturated by all these Nazi swastikas, pictures in the window of Hitler as a knight in armor riding a white horse. When the parades and things would come through, people would climb in the trees and chant, "We thank our leader, our Savior." It was just extraordinary--but this fervor!

George and I were taking German lessons from a young man at the university and his wife. George was taking from him, and I was taking from her, in different rooms in the apartment. They were ardent Nazis it turned out--this was an underground movement in Vienna--and they were very nice. We liked them very much you see.

There was a lot of misunderstanding in the United States about what was going on. The majority in Austria, I'm sure, was in favor of the takeover because there was so much despair about economics and poverty. People didn't have any freedom then--they never had had any freedom, so it was a completely different situation than if it had happened in the States. I think it was very hard for people to understand that.

I should get my letters out and read them again. I've forgotten what I had said about it, but I probably said that kind of thing, trying to make the people back at home understand what was really happening, because I knew that the papers weren't carrying it.

Riess: That was before you understood what Hitler's larger program was.

M. Foster: We didn't understand it in its largest sense, but we certainly knew that Hitler was very anti-Jews and doing nasty things to Jews.

Mother, and Wife

Riess: Let's finish your year there. You became pregnant?

M. Foster: I got pregnant in the summer. We were in Paris in the summer. My Dad sent us over a car. You couldn't buy cars in Europe, so he put a car on the boat for us and sent it to us. We spent the summer driving around Europe. We went to a big international anthropological conference in Copenhagen with a man that we had known in Vienna and his English wife. We traveled with them in the summer. We went to Scandinavia with them.

In the fall we settled in Paris and I knew I was pregnant then. I had gone to a doctor in England to make sure I was pregnant, and it was interesting because the doctor didn't examine me at all. In the States you would be examined instantly. He just accepted the fact that I was pregnant and told me to eat crackers or something in the mornings so I wouldn't have morning sickness--because I'd begun having quite a lot of morning sickness.

Riess: When did you come back?

M. Foster: November. I think just before Thanksgiving. We went to Washington first and then came out to California.

Riess: And you had your baby in Washington?

M. Foster: California. Peralta Hospital in Oakland. Our baby was a ten-pound baby boy. I had to have a Caesarean, which I wouldn't have wanted to have, but he was two or three weeks late, and turned out to be ten pounds and a breech baby, and the doctor decided I had to have a Caesarean.

He was such a wonderful big baby [laughing]--George came to the hospital to see me, and this was a few days after the baby was born, and he came in and I said, "Did you see the baby?" And he said, "No." I was shocked. I had expected him to instantly want to run to the window to see the baby through the glass, and I said, "Why not?" And he said, "Because the other babies are so puny and small and red, and don't look attractive, and if I ask for my baby--he's so big and so beautiful, I think they'll feel badly and be envious, so that I don't want to put them through that." [laughter]

Riess: Did you have some ideas about child-rearing?

M. Foster: Well, I never had had anything to do with babies. My little cousins, when they'd been born I'd see them, admire them, and I'd play with them as they got a little bigger, but I never had any care of babies. I told you that I had a practical nurse who came and stayed with me for a couple of weeks after I came home from the hospital. She showed me how to bathe the baby and how to look after the baby. I think I took to it quite naturally, really.

Riess: It is a jump, but the next real change in your life might be going to Mexico in 1941.

M. Foster: Yes, and Jeremy was two years old by then. George just assumed that we would go, and that we would leave the baby with his mother. His mother told us later that she was scared to death to have to take our baby. But George was the king. What George said went.

Riess: In his family he was king?

M. Foster: Yes, kind of. He was the oldest child, and he was a strong person, and his siblings obviously expected him to be the leader. Maybe that's true of all older children. His brother Bob was three years younger, his brother Gene was eight years younger, and his sister Janet was thirteen years younger.

George's mother always told me that she didn't plan this, it just happened. I guess she didn't use any birth control, but she just had intervals where she got pregnant.

When George told his mother that she was to take care of the baby, she agreed. I'm not sure he gave her any choice. I just took it for granted because I knew I couldn't take the baby to the field.

Riess: How was the decision made to go to the field?

M. Foster: George had to do fieldwork for his Ph.D.

Riess: You could have stayed here.

M. Foster: Yes. But George wouldn't have had it that way. I probably wouldn't have either, but I might well have because that was terrible, leaving my baby was terrible. But I wouldn't have traded anything for the experience--it turned out to be wonderful.

So we took the baby to Iowa and installed him with George's mother, who then didn't mention us to him from the time we left until the time we came back! I certainly didn't expect that. Her idea was she was afraid that it would be so upsetting for him, but I think it would have been a lot better if she'd talked about us. By the time we came back he'd totally forgotten us! It was about four months, and he turned two just after we got back.

George and I drove back to California, and all along the way Jeremy was missing Grandma. I spent the trip singing to him, singing "California Here We Come," trying to keep him feeling happy so that he wasn't thinking about what was happening--because for him it was like being taken off by a stranger. Except that I didn't act like a stranger. I felt so sad that he didn't remember me. I don't think I'd have done it if I had known I was going to feel that way.



Mickie Foster with Melissa and Jeremy, 1946.



Mickie and George Foster, and Jeremy and Melissa and Dog Teddy, on the lawn of their house in Washington, D.C., August, 1948.

VI DISCOVERING LINGUISTICS

Field Work with George ##

- Riess: The work with the Sierra Popoluca was the beginning of your work in linguistics, and it was George's first time in the field too.
- M. Foster: No. George had been in the field in California. He'd gone to Round Valley.¹
- Riess: Tell me about how you and George introduced yourselves to this Popoluca community and figured out what you were going to do.
- M. Foster: I knew I was going to do whatever was there; whatever George was doing, I'd fit into it. I didn't have any specific plans for me.

He was going to work on the economic life, which was farming. He had made a trip down before with a Mexican assistant, Rafael Carillo, and he had somewhat worked out what he was going to do. And we had gone to Mexico before that and lived with a family and learned Spanish. We left Jeremy then too, but that was brief. We left Jeremy with my mother that time. [tape interruption]

¹ George got a phone call today from somebody at the museum at Cal saying that there was a Yuki Indian--George's fieldwork was with the Yuki Indians--a Yuki Indian who said that George had used his grandfather as an informant in Round Valley, and he wanted to meet George. This is to be tomorrow and I have my chemotherapy tomorrow, so I--I would insist on going, I would just love to. George said to him, "Oh, then your grandfather is Eben Tillotsen." And George had told me so much about Eben Tillotsen as an informant! I would have been just dying to meet this man.
MF

- Riess: The practical aspects of heading out for field work are interesting.
- M. Foster: We'd planned this very carefully because George knew, because he had gone down there before. He hadn't gone into the Popoluca, but he'd been in the general area, and he knew it was very mountainous, and he knew that if we were going to live there we'd have to take some food and things with us. We took camp cots, sleeping bags. We took dried soups, whatever dried foods that we could find.
- Riess: You're not supposed to depend on the community?
- M. Foster: Well--and you don't know if you can. We had hope that we could get some kinds of things, but I remember we took canned butter. We took quite a lot of supplies.
- Riess: And that was all shipped in before you got there?
- M. Foster: No. It went with us. We went on the train, and we made a lot of changes, and they were very rural trains. We went through Mexico City to Veracruz, getting deeper and deeper into the back country. Then we got to a little town called Catemaco, with a very pretty lake, and we found a man who had horses to pack us in.

When we were in Catemaco we heard about a woman somehow, and we sort of interviewed her--talked to her in her house--and she looked like a witch, and there was candle-light, and she was telling all these stories and things. That was my first experience with any informant in the field and it just blew my mind!

Then we went with Don Enrique, who had the horses, and a boy maybe fourteen or fifteen years old whose name was Luc, I think. He was like a little frightened fawn. He was a really interesting child. And he helped with the horses. We rode out from Catemaco, and the first night out we spent in a little tiny Popoluca village. They were very suspicious people.

Oh, and we had to go to the governor's office in Veracruz and get a big document with a gold seal, a vouchsafe for us, so every time we came to a town--they were not towns, they were villages--we'd present this certificate saying that we were to be allowed to do whatever we wanted. The main thing about it was that it had this gold seal, so it looked authoritative. We would take it to the main authority in the town, who probably couldn't read, but he had a secretary who helped him and he'd look at it--he'd hold it upside down half the time.

Finding an Informant, Documenting a Language

Riess: I want to move along on this because I fear repeating George. Let's talk about how doing the language became interesting for you.

M. Foster: Well, the language was sort of accidental. First we tried one village, and they were so suspicious of us we decided that we couldn't stay there. So we went to the village that was the head of the district and municipality. It was a little bit bigger and had had more contact with outside people. Not much, but a little bit. There we tried to get people to talk to us, but it was a very unfriendly kind of people and it was hard to get anybody to talk to us. For one thing, they were very hardworking, so they would spend all day in their fields. (George finally--because he was interested in agriculture and so on, he could get some people to let him go with them out to the field.)

In order to get anybody to sit down and talk to us and tell us anything, we decided we had to tell them why we were there, what we were interested in. We decided that we'd say we were interested in the language because we knew that the language had never been studied. (One team of anthropologists had gone through a few years before and had written a little article about it in some little journal and had taken down a few words--a small vocabulary.) We decided to tell them we were interested in the language and see if we could pay somebody to come and talk to us about the language. We thought that would be a legitimate way to get started.

We managed to find this man named Leandro Pérez. I don't remember how he came into our lives, but he turned out to be a marvelously good linguistic informant. He was the best one I've ever had, and I've tried a lot of linguistic informants in various places. We'd hired some other people before him and they all were impossible to work with; they wanted to tell you things, but they didn't want to answer questions, or else they thought that they could just sort of lay it out for you, so it didn't work. Leandro came our way; we began to work with Leandro, and I was the scribe.

George had had some course that had to do with phonetics at Cal from Kroeber. I had had a course called "Language" at Columbia from George Herzog which didn't teach me anything useful, but I had had experience with French and German, so I had a little knowledge of languages that weren't English.

Riess: And what kind of a language was this?

M. Foster: It's an Indian language--but a few of the men could speak some Spanish, some more fluently than others, and we could talk to them in Spanish. Also we had Rafael, so that if we couldn't make ourselves understood, we could work through Rafael.

Riess: And taking down the language, you had your systems?

M. Foster: Well, George knew some phonetics. I have a good ear, a better ear than George had, so that I was kind of the master of the phonetic part, and the writing. George tended to take the lead, certainly in the beginning to get started.

People say, "How could you do that? How did you get started?" Well, it's not very difficult. I don't know why it isn't obvious. You start asking for words. You point to something--obviously they'd know the word *piedra* for stone, so then you say, "Ah, you say *piedra*"--and you build up some vocabulary. Then you start trying to elicit sentences. You say something like, "How do you say, 'I go'?" And they give you, "You go." But you don't know that they're giving you "you," they might reverse it, so after a while it comes to you that that's wrong, and you begin to understand what the word for "I" is, and what the verb is, and how the verb is conjugated to shift from first person to second person.

Riess: In this language was there anything written down?

M. Foster: No. Nothing.

Riess: Were they pleased with having you study their language?

M. Foster: No, and they didn't pay much attention, except for Leandro and a few others that we got pretty well acquainted with--mostly because George was going out in the field. I couldn't talk to the women much because the women didn't speak Spanish, and the women were more suspicious than the men. But Leandro was willing to come after he'd worked in the field during the day. He would come to us and sit with us for a couple of hours maybe, and I would take down everything. We would take turns asking questions, or whoever thought of a good question would ask it.

Riess: You have to repeat things many times to double check.

M. Foster: Well, yes. But after a while you build up a vocabulary, so you know that what you're getting is accurate.

Riess: Eventually you can speak this language?

M. Foster: We didn't, because we didn't stay that long. But I still remember more Popoluca than I do Tarascan, which I worked much longer on--and that was after I was getting my Ph.D. in linguistics that I tackled Tarascan. Tarascan is a much more difficult language than Popoluca, in the sense that it is completely suffixing. You put the root first and string a whole series of suffixes on to get meanings that in English we would have to have a whole sentence to do. It's hard to speak that kind of a language, because you have to plan the whole word ahead of time, unless you learn it like a child which is hard to do when you're an adult.

Riess: Transcribing the Popoluca was a great learning experience?

M. Foster: Yes. It was awfully interesting. In a certain sense, a lot of what I learned, I learned later.

We wanted to get text, we didn't want to get isolated sentences and this and that vocabulary. We started asking Leandro if he had any stories. He said he didn't know any stories. Then George said, "Couldn't you tell us the story of your childhood?" So he told us the story of his childhood, which was everybody's story of how they'd been beaten as children. And that happened! We had a family with little children living next door and we could hear that every day!

Our house had stick walls, so we had no privacy. People could just stand outside and stare at us. It was awfully hard for me to get used to having no privacy. We had a tent that we slept in, but otherwise we did all our living in this little stick house with a dirt floor and thatched roof. [laughs] One day, after several weeks, some men appeared. We were cordial and invited them in and offered them cigarettes--everybody wanted to smoke, and they'd always spit when they smoked. So they sat and spat on our dirt floor [laughs].

Well, they had been there a while, and we were kind of making small talk and trying to figure out what they were doing there, and then it turned out that one of the men was the owner of the house! We were living in his house [laughs]. I can't remember how it was resolved, whether we paid him something. If we did it was not much, certainly. But we continued living there.

Riess: You were trying to get people to tell stories.

M. Foster: Well, Leandro; it wasn't "people." Actually later we tried to get some other people to tell stories, but they would claim they didn't know stories, or they'd give us something very limited.

Leandro told us the story of his life, sort of a brief version of his life as a child, and then still said he didn't know any stories. So George said, "Did you ever have a fright cure?" George knew enough about Mexican Indian lives that he knew that fright--being frightened--made you fall ill, so there were cures for fright. Leandro said, yes, he'd had a fright cure. So he told us about that in Popoluca, and I wrote everything down.

After he'd tell us these things in Popoluca, then I'd go back over everything and make sure I'd gotten it correctly.

Riess: You would read the story back to him.

M. Foster: Yes. And I asked what this or that word meant--such stuff.

Riess: So you gave them the beginning of a written language?

M. Foster: Any language is a written language, if somebody writes it down.

There are lots of languages in Mexico. It's very full of different languages--often in a very small space. Sometimes a village will have its own language. Actually, this was a dialect of Popoluca, and really there is no difference between a dialect and a language. When things get standardized then that becomes a language.

Riess: Has there been any interest by the villagers these many decades later in the work that you did there?

M. Foster: Not really.

Leandro began telling us stories though--that's what I was trying to lead up to. He came one day and said he had a story he could tell us, and he told us a wonderful story, and then every time he came he had a different story. So there is this treasure trove of stories. I'm not sure why he at first felt reluctant to tell us stories. But then he got so he was thinking about it all the time. So we had wonderful stories, some of them Spanish stories, but mostly indigenous stories.

Riess: Maybe he didn't understand what your concept of story was?

M. Foster: I don't think so. I think there was just some reluctance to reveal--I don't know.

Riess: What were the culture shock issues there? The lack of privacy?

M. Foster: Yes. Lack of privacy was the most difficult one, especially in the beginning, because people were so curious about us that they would just crowd around. Children, of course, were always peeking in our house, but adults would too. And the people were not easy to get into conversation with.

Some groups of Mexican Indians are very friendly, but these unfortunately were not. So we were working at that all the time, trying to talk to people. Culture shock is just being afraid you're going to make *faux pas* all the time. You know, you want the people to accept you, and you're so afraid that things that you do or say appear to be taboo subjects.

Riess: What if you don't like the people?

M. Foster: We didn't like them very well. We got so we liked some of them; we certainly liked Leandro--we'd gotten very fond of Leandro.

But also, the society was polygamous, they had multiple wives. Leandro was young, and he later took another wife. We went back to check some stories or something later, and he had taken another wife. They were Catholic nominally, but the priest didn't live there and didn't have much contact with the villages--he'd come maybe twice a year.

Riess: The not liking would be hard.

M. Foster: Yes. It feels if you don't know whether the people are being accepting of you or--you don't know what they're going to do.

Back to Berkeley, a New Baby, Syracuse, and UCLA

Riess: Coming back from the field, then you collected Jeremy and drove out to Berkeley, and George returned to graduate school. Did you help him with his dissertation?

M. Foster: I got pregnant again quite soon after we came back. Melissa is three years younger than Jeremy, and Jeremy was two when we were with the Popoluca. So about the minute we came back, pretty much, we had another baby. [tape interruption]

When George had just finished his Ph.D. his professor, Kroeber, called up one morning and said that there was a job possibility that George could have if he wanted it. He didn't say what university it was, but he said it was in the east, and that it was not a top university, but a good middle-range university. He didn't give us any details. George was eager to take any job that came his way, and he made up his mind to accept [the offer from Syracuse University].

In the meantime we had bought a house in Berkeley--we loved Berkeley--and so we rented out the house while we were in Syracuse. Then we came back and George was offered a visiting professorship at UCLA, replacing a professor who was going to be away, so we were there that year. In the meantime, Melissa had been born, and she was a baby when we went to UCLA, so we had two little children.

Texts, Grammar, Phonology, in Partnership ##

Riess: You said you have an ear for language?

M. Foster: I do have a good ear. I suppose it may go back to learning French fairly early. I don't have a good ear for music, so that is sort of interesting. I can imitate accents fairly easily, so people have a tendency to think that I'm better at it than I am because I sound fairly good.

Riess: Do you have a gift for the grammatical structure of language.

M. Foster: That isn't a gift. In trying to work through the Popoluca, I had to figure out the grammar. I wouldn't have been able to do it except that I had a great many texts, so that I could figure our grammatical construction by the grammatical uses in the text.

I just got started telling you about the texts. We collected notebooks, little school notebooks that we'd acquired before we got there, and that we filled with stories. And we filled them with other material too. That's where George kept all of his notes for his dissertation, in these notebooks. And I kept a sort of diary narrative, and we also had a lot of paper, scratch paper and things, that we wrote on.

So we tried to work out the grammatical forms by asking, "How do you say this, and how do you say that?" That's kind of taboo nowadays in linguistics to work at it that way, but we

didn't know how to do it. We just did it any way that we happened to think of.

Riess: At the end of the day would you rewrite your notes?

M. Foster: I don't think so.

We didn't start writing it up until long after, so we didn't really know what we had and what we didn't have. But because we had all these texts, you find that suffixes repeat themselves, and you know the verb stem of common verbs. We tried to figure out what would be the root and what would be the suffixes.

There's an awful lot of it that I hadn't worked out in the field at all, and so the only way I could do it was just comparatively; because we had made sort of a loose Spanish translation, trying to attempt to figure out what the story was about. We'd had to do that. But I did all the grammar later.

The phonology is the part that George worked on, because we came out of the field, and we'd just invented our own writing systems, slightly based on what George knew from this course he had from Kroeber, for sounds that weren't in our language or any language we knew. We had to figure out ways to write it so we'd know what it was. Fortunately, it was not a terribly difficult language phonetically.

But phonetics has to be translated into phonemics, which shows what are the regularities. A good writing system is phonemic, which means that you could have something that you wrote with a single letter that differed from environment to environment--meaning position in the word, what the other sounds are that are surrounding this. There is a lot more differentiation in languages than you know. You just sort of learn that by ear. You copy what you hear, so that if you were going to put down every little phonetic variation, you'd have more letters than you could deal with.

For example, when we have a "p" at the beginning of a word like "Papa" it's aspirated--a little puff of air comes along. If you have it after an "s" like "spin," it's not aspirated. Some languages, like Tarascan for example, have both an aspirated and an unaspirated "p" in every position, so you've got to know which is which, and you've got to be able to recognize it. But in English, you don't have to write them differently because they just occur, and you don't even notice you pronounce them differently; you aren't aware that you do.

So "p's" sometimes become "b's" in some languages and in certain positions.

We didn't know that, that's the thing about it, we didn't know about phonemics. If you know about phonemics, it's a kind of a shorthand. A good writing system is phonemic. Phonemics became very important in linguistics just before we went to the field, but we had not had any experience with phonemics. I looked back over my Columbia notes. The professor had said nothing whatsoever about phonemes, and George had learned nothing but the phonetic alphabet from Kroeber. He didn't know anything about phonemes. This whole concept was fairly new.

When we came out, we ran into a friend who had done a lot of linguistic work, and he said "Well, you know about phonemes don't you?" And we didn't know what he was talking about, so we had to try to get ourselves educated after we'd done this fieldwork. Fortunately, it wasn't a very complex language in that sense--we could figure out how to do it. And our writing system proved to be phonemic itself.

Riess: George didn't have as much interest in phonemics or phonetics as you?

M. Foster: George was busy with other things. He was writing his dissertation, for one thing, and then he was busy teaching, so I was the one who'd written down the stories. I suppose perhaps I had more interest and more time--I don't know that George--if I hadn't been with him--whether he would have done this, since it was his idea that we tackle language. I suppose he might well have. I don't quite know how it would have been.

But certainly, doing the field work, we were a team, and we'd discuss it with each other. We'd get ideas about how it was organized. Except that most of the grammar--we knew simple tenses and things like that because they recurred all the time, but there was a lot more complexity to the grammar than we really understood at the time. I sweat blood trying to grasp these things; trying to figure out why it changed here or there, if it didn't stay the same, took me quite a long time.

Riess: You kept at that.

M. Foster: I was doing a lot of it when we were living in Mexico City and the children were small. George started working in Tzintzuntzan, and I went with him occasionally, but I didn't do the fieldwork with him in Tzintzuntzan to begin with.

Riess: How did you work out your differences when you and George disagreed on something that you were observing in the field?

M. Foster: I'm trying to think if we've ever had any arguments about what actually happened. I don't think so. We may have each seen a little different phase of it, or talked to different people, in which case we just each write our notes--and the two sets of notes have maybe different thoughts about it.

Riess: When you are in Tzintzuntzan are you George's wife? Or his assistant? His equal?

M. Foster: Not his equal--it's better not to be because he is going about it in a businesslike systematic way, especially after having been there [Tzintzuntzan] for a long time and come back so much. If he's got his notebook and is writing things down, it's perfectly okay. I think it would be rather different if I started doing that. But then I come home and sit down at the typewriter and type.

Riess: You come home to your home in Tzintzuntzan.

M. Foster: Yes, where we live. We each have a desk, and we each have a typewriter down there. Most of our work's been done in pre-computer days, so we haven't--and we haven't done as much writing down there in recent years as we used to. But so much happens all the time, you know? You just hardly have time to write it up. Then we read each other's notes, but I don't think we--we may discuss with each other--"Did you notice so-and-so did such-and-such?" But I suppose we only discuss it if strange things happened. Maybe things we don't understand. "Why did so-and-so do such-and-such?" It's a lot like gossiping about your neighbors!

Working on the Sierra Popoluca Grammar

[insert from Interview 6: March 22, 2000] ##

Riess: Your fieldwork with the Popoluca language, when did you get a chance to work that up?²

²Sierra Popoluca Speech, by Mary L. Foster and George M. Foster, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1948.

M. Foster: From the time that we collected the data--George really didn't work on it. I really wrote most of the book, because it was mostly grammar. George had actually worked out some details about the phonology, which he's forgotten all about and didn't ever follow up anything on that, but I had to--we had collected a lot of texts and so I was working to analyze the texts.

That was a terrific puzzle for me because the grammar was complicated, and I had to just simply find places in the text where different constructions were repeated in order to try to figure out the verbal structure and all kinds of grammatical problems that I had with it. I knew what words were, but I didn't know what the morphemes--the grammatical morphemes--were that made the grammar meaningful. So I had to keep struggling with that, and I would dream about it at night, and it would come to me suddenly when I wasn't thinking about it. This must happen to you too, often when you're trying to figure something out, then suddenly it pops into your head when you're not paying any attention.

I spent a few years just struggling with this, you know. I struggled with it when we were at UCLA where I had help from Harry Hoijer, a linguist and a good friend of ours. I struggled with it when we were living in Mexico. George then was with the Institute of Social Anthropology, running the Mexican part of the program, and one of the other people that was working with him was Stanley Newman, a professor of linguistic anthropology at the University of New Mexico.

I spent a lot of time talking to Stanley Newman, not having him help me with my task, but just trying to orient myself about linguistics, because I had not had any linguistics until I audited that course of Harry Hoijer's. Stanley was actually quite helpful to me over that two-year period in Mexico where I was always kind of turning over this grammar stuff in my head and working on it.

Riess: When you say that something would come to you in the middle of the night, what would be an example of how that might work?

M. Foster: I don't know that it came to me in the middle of the night, but it would come to me suddenly while I'd be doing something completely other--it would pop into my head--the solution to some problem that I had, and I can't give you any examples whatsoever. It was a common experience.

Riess: You had worked with one informant. But ideally would you want to have more than one? Or is that not necessary?

M. Foster: Not if you've got a good informant. You don't really need more. My Tarascan informant had lost a lot of teeth, so her pronunciation was bad. I bought her false teeth because she was nice to work with--some informants get impatient, she never did. There are also other people that you hear speaking and use comparatively.

Riess: So you don't worry about idiosyncracies that might be part of the informant's speech.

M. Foster: Not really. I did have a couple of other people who told us small stories, but they were the kind of informants that want to tell you what you should be thinking about, instead of just carrying on and telling you a story. They tended to want to instruct me in things I didn't want to be instructed or need to be instructed about.

Riess: The issue of one's own personal speech patterns--if there is such a thing?

M. Foster: Well, they're not that crucial. Once you've figured out the phonemic structure, you've taken the idiosyncratic part pretty much out of it. So the kind of minor differences that different speakers have, I suspect that they're less in a very small, unified community than there would be--for instance here we have so much racial difference and a lot of completely different backgrounds that it would be quite different, but down there, when there's a tiny little community with everybody speaking the same way, you don't really find anything particularly idiosyncratic.

Riess: You lived in Mexico City for how long?

M. Foster: From 1944 to 1946. The children were two and five when we went to Mexico, so that being with the children was certainly a big part of being in Mexico. But I did manage to hire a very competent European woman who had lived in Spain and spoke Spanish-style Spanish--not Mexican Spanish. She took care of the children during the day. Children had to be chaperoned all the time, I couldn't just turn my children out to play. So she would take them to the woods, to the parks and other things. And also I could also travel with George and leave her safely with the children. That was a big help to me.

When we were there, George and I also audited courses at the School of Anthropology from major Mexican anthropologists--like Alfonso Caso, and Roberto Weitlaner. Weitlaner was also a linguistic anthropologist, so he was helpful to me. I had quite a lot of good advice from people, but as I said,

especially from Newman, and Harry Hoijer. That was more like studying linguistics before I ever got back to getting my Ph.D., and that was why I knew as much about linguistics as I did, because I sweat blood doing that work.

Traveling with the Covarrubias

M. Foster: While we were in Mexico City we did some traveling--with Miguel and Rose Covarrubias. And I might tell about that here. Miguel Covarrubias was writing a book about the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.³ He had gotten it written, but he wanted to go back and make some corrections. So he asked George and me if we wanted to go down there with him and Rose, his wife, while he checked back in down in that area and talked to his old friends and informants.

Miguel really became quite an anthropologist. He was mostly interested in art, but he was really interested in everything. In archaeology--he did a great deal on Olmec archaeology which was very useful and is remembered today as one of the main sources.

Riess: I've only known of him as one of that pantheon of great Mexican artists.

M. Foster: At first you know he was in New York. He made caricatures for *Vanity Fair*--the old *Vanity Fair* magazine--of all sorts of celebrities.

We went with him to Tehuantepec and met his Tehuana friends and had a very interesting time. To get there you used to have to fly or take a train, and if you flew you just could go to certain places and you didn't see the countryside, or see the small towns or what have you. But when we were traveling with Miguel we went very slowly, and we spent time in the town and then the city and met his Tehuana friends who were the women who wore those famous costumes.

Riess: Did you camp?

M. Foster: No. We stayed in small hotels which were full of bedbugs and all kinds of things. [laughs] I remember one of Miguel and

³ Miguel Covarrubias, *Mexico South: The Isthmus of Tehuantepec*, Knopf, 1947.

Rose's friends, a young woman in her beautiful Tehuana costume, and she was sitting--. The rooms had sort of cot beds, and she was sitting on the cot and she had bare feet--her native costume was the kind where you had bare feet. So she had her feet pulled up and touching the underside of the mattress, and she got bitten by the bedbugs on her heels. [laughs]

We used to stay at all kinds of strange places when we were living in Mexico and traveling around. That was when I wasn't with my children when we took trips out different places. But we carried pyrethrum powder with us and we would put a rim of pyrethrum powder all the way around the edge of the mattress so that the bedbugs wouldn't--see bedbugs hide during the daytime under the mattress, and they come out at night and bite you. And they tended to bite me more than they bit George--in fact, that's been the story of my life. In olden days New York used to be full of bedbugs, all sorts of places were, but Mexico is particularly prone to bedbugs.

The Covarrubias were great fun to be with, partly because they knew so much about the crafts. Miguel wanted George to write a book about Mexican crafts with him, and George could have because pottery was his specialty--and he wound up paying a lot of attention to crafts--but George had other fish to fry, I guess, and somehow that never came to pass. But we used to go to markets with the Covarrubias and talk about the crafts and look at the crafts and buy things.

Rose loved to buy things, so Rose and I would drift around buying kind of strange things, and figuring out how to use them. Rose was wonderful at that, and Rose's house was full of beautiful things that she'd collected. There was just an exhibit over here, at Fort Mason at the Mexican Folk Museum, of the Covarrubias' collection, which we went to--actually with Stanley Brandes and his girlfriend. That was nice because we kind of reviewed our experiences with the Covarrubias, who really were probably our closest friends in Mexico City except for Starker and Betty Leopold.

Starker was working on his book on the birds of Mexico. He and Betty had a little boy and we had two little children. When we got back here to Berkeley, of course, the Leopolds were still always close friends. They both died too young. We had family picnics together a lot. We did a lot of other things too with the Leopolds.

Riess: Any others particularly from that time in Mexico?

M. Foster: Well, the people that were working with George, Stanley Newman and his wife, and Donald Brand and his wife, we saw a lot of. There are probably others, but I can't off the top of my head think of them. After that, when we left Mexico we went to Washington, and the Lipscombs--Tura was my sister's close friend in college, and John--they were our very, very close friends all the time we were in Washington, as were quite a few of the people at the Smithsonian. Julian and Jane Steward. Matt and Marion Stirling, they were very close friends. Matt Stirling was the archaeologist who studied the Olmec giant heads. Matt and Marion did a great deal of fieldwork in the same part of Mexico that we did with the Popoluca.

Riess: Did the wives have careers?

M. Foster: No--the interesting thing is that in my day women tended not to have careers. They tended to get married, even if they had been studying seriously some subject, or cared deeply about some subject. They often married somebody whose work was similar, and that they could be supportive of or helpful to or work with--much as I did with George until I finally went back and got my Ph.D. I had no career whatsoever, I was just doing whatever George did. And I think we were fairly equal partners--as far as fieldwork was concerned, we both worked on it.

Riess: So the wives were like you, interested in what their husbands were doing.

M. Foster: I think on the whole they weren't necessarily interested in the same things--Tura, for example. Johnny was a lawyer through and through. No he wasn't--he had multiple interests. He was quite extraordinary, but so was Tura. Tura read a great deal and was interested in all sorts of topics, so I always felt that Tura was very interesting to be with. Also the anthropologists' wives almost always were compatible and interesting.

You can't live with an anthropologist, I don't suppose, without being interested in what he's doing. Especially if you go with him when he does fieldwork. You can't escape being interested. Of course, they didn't always all go with their husbands. Now more of them are real couples where they're both working on something. You know, it's both harder and easier for people now.

It's easier in the sense that you can keep on with your particular field, or your particular interest. You can go on doing your own work, instead of just being a sort of a

helpmeet. But of course, if you marry somebody the way I did George, where we started out together--we were undergraduate majors in anthropology under Herskovits, we were absolutely equal at that point. I did go to Columbia for a year for graduate school, and George went on to Cal to graduate school, so we both kept on in a certain sense. I think that George didn't tend to think of me as somebody who was "just a wife."

Riess: You said it's both harder and easier. Harder in what way?

M. Foster: Finding jobs. I think that makes it really tough.

VII GRADUATE WORK IN LINGUISTICS

[Interview 6: March 22, 2000] ##

The Linguistics Department at Berkeley

Riess: Were you both keeping an eye out for a place to come back and work, even that early?

M. Foster: No. We weren't even thinking about it. Because you see when he finished this work, then he went to the Smithsonian and took over the directorship of the Institute of Social Anthropology.

Riess: But after that first taste of doing the linguistics with the Popoloca, you didn't want to rush right down and do some more?

M. Foster: It took me a long time to write that grammar. And I got it published because we were at the Smithsonian then for the next six and a half years.

I'm trying to think. I always intended to go back to graduate school. First I had thought that I was going to get a Ph.D. in anthropology. Then I thought what I wanted to do was to get a combined degree like Sapir--I don't know if you know who Sapir was--but he was a very famous anthropologist/linguist and he had triple interest in cultural anthropology, linguistics, and psychology. I was so smitten with what Sapir did, that that's what I intended to specialize in. I was going to be a Sapirian-type anthropologist.

It wasn't until we got back to Cal--because we kept moving you see--not only were we in Washington--well, we weren't really in Washington for six and a half years because we spent a year of that time in Spain, so we were always interrupting, going and doing something else. So I couldn't really--besides which I'm very shy and I'm scared to go and enroll or try to. It took me a while to work my way into it, or try to decide what I was going to do. And then it all

seemed so temporary. I thought, "Oh, I can't really get started on something here, because we're probably not going to be here."

So it wasn't until we got back to Berkeley that I then began talking to professors at Cal, and I told them that I--I talked to people in linguistics and in anthropology, because here it's two separate departments. You see, linguistics started in the United States as a field of anthropology and it still is, but linguistics in Europe came out of philology, where it was mostly Indo-European languages sort of thing. But under Boas in the United States--Boas was the founder of American anthropology, and he was very interested in language as sort of the key to culture--and of course there are so many different languages in Indian America that he sent students out all over to gather data on languages, which was just sort of a never ending project because there were so many different languages.

Riess: If you had wanted to pursue the three, cultural anthropology, linguistics, and psychology simultaneously, was that being offered anywhere?

M. Foster: No. What I was trying to get at was when I talked to the professors at Berkeley, they said it will take you forever if you try to satisfy three different departments for your Ph.D., so that the best thing to do is just decide on one of them. Get your degree, then go ahead and do what you want to do.

So I decided on linguistics because the anthropology department had some linguistics but not much, and a separate department in linguistics had been established after the war at Cal. The main linguist was a woman named Mary Haas, who had taken her degree under Sapir at Yale. She was the main one to convince me that it was crazy to try to do three fields--that you could spend your life just doing your Ph.D. dissertation. [laughs] You should get on with it--so just cut it down and do one thing.

George at that point was a professor of anthropology, and all the anthropologists were my close friends and I thought, well, it will be easier to be in a department where they don't know me so well. Particularly since I was an older student and the wife of a professor. That's kind of a hard thing. You feel as if you have to work twice as hard as everybody else in order to prove that you're really somebody who should be doing this. [laughs]

Riess: Why did linguistics appear here after the war?

M. Foster: I think it was because of Kroeber. Kroeber was very interested in linguistics. Stanley Brandes lent George a copy of Theodora's book about Alfred Kroeber, her husband--we had never acquired it and never had read it, and George still had the book. I read that after I read her oral history, so I got very full of the Kroebers and what they had done. They became very good friends of ours--we knew them very well, but it has occurred to me in thinking about it that although I knew Alfred, I knew Krakie better. Krakie was my female friend, you know, we talked about a lot of things.

I think the reason I was always a little in awe of Alfred was because when I was an undergraduate at Northwestern, majoring in anthropology, the major textbook was Alfred's *Anthropology*. Then I had gone to Washington to visit my parents, and the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association met in Washington during the Christmas vacation when I was there, so I went to the meeting, and the meetings in those days were very different from the meetings now, because now there are so many anthropologists that there are a whole series of sessions going on at the same time and big rooms, smaller rooms all over the place in a big hotel.

In those days, they just had--I don't remember what auditorium it was, but it was a big auditorium kind of room and there were just the speakers and the audience. I sat in the audience and I heard Kroeber speak and other people, but I was particularly interested in Kroeber's speech since I had read his textbook. Here was this great man--and I was a little undergraduate who'd got to listen to him. When I finally was out here and became social friends of the Kroebers, I think I was always a little bit in awe of him.

I guess even before I started going back to be a graduate student in linguistics he knew that I was interested in language and that I had written this grammar of the Popoluca, and so he used to give me offprints of articles that he'd written, where he had extra copies kicking around, he'd pass them along to me. So we did have a little interchange about languages, but not really a great deal and I think I was--I felt too ignorant sort of to bring up the topic and discuss it with him.

Riess: But you're saying that linguistics got started here because--?

M. Foster: Because Kroeber was so interested. And then Kroeber started the department, you know, and Kroeber was trained by Boas. And because Boas was interested in languages, Kroeber, when he came

out to California was focused a lot on languages. He did a lot of linguistic work.

In those days, people were trying to work out what the relationships between languages were--trying to set up families of languages. So that was what Kroeber was doing.

Riess: And linguistics was set up outside of anthropology?¹

M. Foster: Kroeber was a friend of Sapir, he knew Sapir, Sapir had been out here. In fact, I think Sapir maybe gave some courses at Cal along in those early days. And the university decided to set up a separate linguistic department and they hired Mary Haas.

Chomsky's Effect on Linguistics Studies

M. Foster: What it did was to draw people who were working on linguistics out of anthropology into a separate field of its own. And they had not just people who were working on Amerindian languages, which is what Kroeber had been doing and Boas had been doing--but in the 1950s when Noam Chomsky came along and began this revolutionary way of looking at linguistics, it changed the field so much that it all got focused on English [language] because Chomsky wasn't an anthropologist.

Chomsky was a linguist who was trained in the philological European tradition of linguistics and didn't come

¹ From 1901 to 1906 a Department of Linguistics under Chairman Benjamin Ide Wheeler offered courses, and in 1904 conferred the Ph.D. on Pliny Goddard (dissertation on the Hupa language). Thereafter, through the initiative of Alfred L. Kroeber, the Department of Anthropology added work in recording and describing unwritten languages, and in tracing their genetic relations. In 1940, instruction in some of these subjects was consolidated by several appointments in linguistics. The linguistics courses were offered in the Departments of Classics and Oriental Languages. In 1947, a group in linguistics offered a Ph.D. degree in linguistics. An M.A. degree was added in 1948. The department was re-established in 1952. An undergraduate major was offered beginning in 1959-60. Since 1952 the department has built up its course offerings as its enrollment and teaching staff have grown. In 1964-65, undergraduate majors numbered 48 and graduate majors 57. [M.B. Emeneau in *The Centennial Record of the University of California*, University of California Printing Department, 1967.]

out of anthropology at all. When I was writing my dissertation, or when I was in the last year or so of my taking courses at Cal, all the linguists were sort of up in the air, they didn't know how to deal with this new methodology of Chomsky's.

It changed the system so drastically, so that all the things that had been pervasive in the anthropological linguistic tradition were being thrown out of the window; all these students had gone off into the field and were doing their dissertations on Amerindian languages and they didn't know how to write their grammars now, because the field was in complete upheaval. That was when I was also finishing and doing my fieldwork in Tarascan and writing my dissertation.

What really happened was that Chomsky--the way linguistics had worked before Chomsky started out with the phonology--. I'd do better by this if I'd had time to think about it overnight. It's a hard thing to explain, because in the early days of phonemics, which was a structural way of dealing with phonology, the things that you were talking about --people's differences in their speaking, their idiosyncratic speech--got ironed out with phonemics. So it was a way of generalizing about contrastive sounds in language.

The grammars were built up always from the phonemics into the morphology, which is the grammatical structure with affixes and went on whatever a particular language is made up of. So it went from short stretches, to longer stretches, and finally then into words, the way words were put together and then into the way that sentences were put together.

But Chomsky started with sentences, clauses, and worked the structure down from the top to the bottom, so it was a complete reversal of the way that linguists had been looking at language, starting with Boas. It made it very difficult for people to understand this new tradition enough to be able to convert their data, which they had gathered under the rules of the old system.

Riess: Chomsky was accepted hook, line, and sinker? Or was there a great struggle?

M. Foster: Chomsky's one of those people who is so full of himself that he threw out the baby with the bathwater. Anything that had gone before him was dead wrong. Somehow he was so overwhelmingly positive about all this that people began thinking that this was what they had to do. It took over very quickly.

Riess: You think of knowledge as being cumulative, and then someone comes in and turns it on its head.

M. Foster: Well, it's just a paradigm shift. This was a very famous paradigm shift.

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M. Foster: Chomsky said that there was some kind of an organ in the brain that was kind of a universal, so that even though languages were different, there was something about this organ--which was never described and I don't know any linguists that subscribed to this theory.

Thoughts on the Acquisition of Language

M. Foster: What you need to think about is that human children are, first of all, very curious about their environment. They explore in every way with their whole body. Touching, feeling, testing, trying out and learning to do what their parents do or the people around them do. They're very imitative, and no other creature is imitative, even great apes. We used to say "monkey see, monkey do." It isn't true. Monkeys are not really imitative. Very, very minimally imitative. I suppose most mammals probably watch each other to a certain extent and may experiment with something somebody has done, but they're not strictly speaking imitative. There've been a lot of experiments with them, and it isn't true that they're imitative. But little children are endlessly curious.

Monkeys are curious too. Monkeys like to fiddle around with things and try things out, so if one monkey sees another monkey fiddling around and something happens, they see that something's happened after something else, then they'll go and fiddle around too. After a while they happen upon the same kind of thing, so then they'll do it, so little by little the whole group will begin doing something. But little children pay a lot of attention, and they pay a lot of attention to mouths, if you've ever watched babies.

Babies when they're just a few months old begin smiling if you smile, or waving if you wave, or following your body movements. And the movements that we make with our mouths are terribly interesting to babies. They stare at you, they watch you. We had a big black German shepherd named Klaus when our grandchildren were babies, and he would come up and open his

big mouth--he loved the babies. And they would just watch with absolute fascination at this great big mouth opening and closing and the big tongue and doing all these things. I think because language became an important part of lives of humans, we're especially attuned to watching mouths, so little children, babies, pick up ways of making sounds.

Language is a gestural system. We don't think of it as gesture because we think of it as something you use to make words, but you use the small muscles in your mouth in very fine tuned ways in order to produce any kind of language. And so you don't need a special organ any more than you need a special organ to make hand movements. Nobody ever suggested that you had to have a special organ for crafts.

Riess: What has Chomsky added to linguistic theory?

M. Foster: What he added for linguists was this way of looking at grammar through transformations. It's just too complicated to try to explain the whole theory.

Riess: I'm interested in the excitement of the paradigm shift, this sort of sense of renewal of the field, or whatever.

M. Foster: It wasn't renewal at all, it was a very vigorous field. It's just that he contributed this dimension to it, and that was a very worthwhile thing. I'm not trying to tear down the influence that he had, which in many ways was very good. But at the same time--.

Lévi-Strauss, Hjelmslev

M. Foster: Linguistics had become very structure oriented; it was called structural linguistics because it was full of rules that you had to demonstrate. If you were writing a grammar you had to show what the rules were, and what parts there were that fit the rules, and what was manipulated in what way. And that was a good useful structural tradition, which had a big influence on Lévi-Strauss in France.

Lévi-Strauss took the clue to structuralism from linguistics and transported it into mythology, folklore, and began looking at folktales in a structural way. So structuralism got too tied to Lévi-Strauss, because a lot of people thought that Lévi-Strauss was exaggerating or taking liberties with structure in order to assume that these

folktales were all intertwined in ways that other people hadn't seen. Somehow or other, that paradigm, although it was effective for anthropology for a while, got torn apart, so that the whole structural tradition was sort of downgraded by people who disliked Lévi-Strauss's work, but structuralism as a way of analyzing things has extreme virtue.

Chomsky then came along at about the same time and claimed that his method was not structural. And his method actually was just as structural as the older tradition, but he condemned structuralism. And he was so emphatic about all of this that it made kind of a schism between structuralists and transformationalists. Labelling has a lot to do with what people think. They don't think it through, they just accept labels.

Riess: Was it difficult for you to reconcile so much theory?

M. Foster: Oh no, because the theory is always fascinating. I'm addicted to theory.

Riess: Then you have to make the theory your own in some way.

M. Foster: You have to explore theories and decide what theories are the best. When I was in graduate school I was in a small seminar-- I don't think there were more than eight if there were that many. But everybody had to take a different theory and prepare--to understand it well enough to be able to present it to the class. I chose a theory that was the most difficult of all. It was a theory by a Danish linguist name Hjelmslev.²

The reason I selected it was because it was so difficult that I knew if I didn't have to do it because I had committed myself to it, I would never have the patience to because he had invented so much new terminology in order to deal with the concepts that he was presenting--when I read his theoretical material in order to give this talk in the symposium, or seminar, whatever it was called, I got absolutely smitten with it. I thought it was just absolutely marvelous--and still do.

An interesting thing about it was that he did very much what Chomsky did, but before Chomsky in the sense that he started with what he called "the text," which was not a sentence necessarily but any kind of string of words that hung

² Louis Hjelmslev (1899-1965), *Resume of a Theory of Language*, edited and translated with an introduction by Francis J. Whitfield, University of Wisconsin Press, 1975.

together, and worked his way down until he came to the phonological part. Not long after that I took Chomsky's first book and Hjelmslev's book--there was just one book that Hjelmslev had written, and it had been translated by a UC professor of psychology, I think he was--and I figured out that Chomsky had read to page 14--I was going to write a paper on it, but I never did--because he'd seen how Hjelmslev was working from the top down, so he decided it was interesting to work from the top down, but he never gave Hjelmslev a bit of credit. Hjelmslev's theory is extremely good and never got picked up because it was too difficult.

I remember when I was teaching at Cal State Hayward, in the anthropology department, I introduced it to one of my colleagues who got so excited by it that he'd read a few paragraphs and he'd have to get up and walk up and down the room, he was so thrilled by this book. You see if you really got into it, it was extraordinary. Unfortunately it never got picked up as a way of writing grammars, and that was what it was supposed to be for.

Riess: This all sounds like an intensely intellectual pursuit.

M. Foster: Well, I remember thinking that I wasn't an intellectual, you know, that people that I thought of as intellectuals were quite different from me. And when we were on a sabbatical in Mexico, living in Cuernavaca, we got acquainted with Michael Maccoby, a psychologist who was working with Erich Fromm. Michael's a well-known psychologist nowadays, but he was quite young then and kind of starting out, and he does psychology--he trains people in factories and all sorts of things. He's worked with Hewlett-Packard, I know.

Michael and I used to get into all sorts of discussions about things and so he began talking about intellectuals or intellectualism and I said I wasn't an intellectual at all. I'd say, "Now, Michael, I think you probably are an intellectual." We had a big discussion. But actually as it turned out--I would call myself an intellectual now, but I wouldn't have then.

Riess: You wouldn't have then.

M. Foster: No. I think it's a kind of tricky thing.

Riess: Maybe you should say what you think one is.

M. Foster: Well, I don't know whether I can. Not in three words certainly.

Riess: I think generally the three words are "pursuit of ideas"--and the excitement about ideas.

M. Foster: Well, but until you actually have a big project and start working on it with a lot of excitement and get involved with theories, I think that's probably what makes you an intellectual.

Riess: Chomsky and Lévi-Strauss were frequent writers for the *New York Review of Books*.

M. Foster: Well, anybody would consider them intellectuals.

I think I became an intellectual, and I suppose in a way I was always moving in that direction, but I didn't really consider myself as an intellectual until quite a bit later.

Riess: I was thinking by being published in the way that they are, they've also become popularizers.

M. Foster: Yes. That's true. Of course, you wouldn't have to be a popularizer to be an intellectual. Hjelmslev, about whom I was speaking a minute ago, was certainly a great intellectual, but he was never popular. In fact, a lot of popular stuff would not qualify to me as intellectual. I think if you're going to be an intellectual, you've got to have theories that are based on a lot of fundamental facts. You can't just be spinning things out of thin air, or you can't just have impressions about things and consider yourself an intellectual.

Riess: And you have to publish to be an intellectual too.

M. Foster: I don't think you have to publish. I think Darwin was an intellectual long before he published.

Riess: But you can't be one in the dark--quietly an intellectual.

M. Foster: You could just be quietly, private--a secret intellectual. I think you certainly could be. I've known people that I've thought were secret intellectuals.

More on Berkeley and the Study of Linguistics

Riess: Tell me a little more about the linguistics department, and Mary Haas. Where did she come from?

M. Foster: She came out of Yale. She was Sapir's student, and she studied more American Indian languages than just about anybody. Her former husband, Morris Swadesh, was also a student of Sapir at Yale. They weren't married terribly long to each other, but they both did a tremendous amount of fieldwork and were very--. Mary particularly had trained a great many students; she sent her students out to do North American languages. I was aberrant because I was working south of the Rio Grande. Everything was done north of the Rio Grande, but I was already in Mexico before I ever got started at Cal studying linguistics.

Riess: But that was for you--that was an advantage.

M. Foster: It was an advantage to me because I already had analyzed a language, so I knew how languages were put together. Of course a lot of the students had had linguistics as undergraduates, so they did have some experience. One thing that the linguistic department under Mary Haas did was to have students write whole grammars. Nowadays nobody writes a whole grammar. The thing has changed completely.

Riess: What is required?

M. Foster: You figure out what the rules are that this language operates with.

Riess: And then you work it through for each verb, for instance?

M. Foster: You have to do a lot of different verbs to make sure that they're regular or irregular. If you take a verb like "go" in English, it's very irregular because the past tense doesn't have the same root as the present tense. Anyway, the students were writing complete grammars, just the way I've written complete grammars of Sierra Popolucan and Tarascan.

Riess: I read about Boas that what he wanted was to study everything, every culture. I guess in linguistics the goal was the same?

M. Foster: That's what I love about anthropology. That it's interested in everything. It's the broadest field that exists. At least about human beings. It covers everything about human beings, that's what's so marvelous about it.

Riess: I guess that's what makes it into a science.

M. Foster: Well, you can have a science of anything that happens. Sciences are based on observations of what actually happens, regularities, not just casual accidental things.

Riess: And linguistics is a science.

M. Foster: Linguistics is definitely a science. In fact, linguistics was pronounced a science when it was still philology, in the 19th century--middle of the 19th century. A group of European philologists discovered that languages had common origins; just by looking at Latin and Greek they could see commonalities. They could see that there were similarities between Latin and Greek, but they didn't quite see what it meant, or how it had started, or why it was that way.

Then philologists went to India and discovered Sanskrit, which is an ancient language that's the ancestor of modern Hindu and Urdu. Sanskrit was a written language. It's hard to study languages that haven't been written down because they don't stand still. You have to have something that you can compare and ponder about; you can't ponder about things that are moving around all the time, you have to be able to stabilize it a little bit in your mind, and writing systems are what did this for language. So Sanskrit had been written.

Then they found that Sanskrit had a lot of similarity to both Latin and Greek, so the philologists decided that they had to have common ancestry. So they tried to puzzle out--first people thought Sanskrit might be the common ancestor, but then they decided no that couldn't be so; it had been written down earlier than Greek, but that didn't make it an ancestor. But then by doing a lot of patient work they discovered that sound changes were regular.

One thing about Latin, for example, is that they knew that French and Spanish and Italian and Portuguese and Rumanian all descended from Latin, because they knew what the Romans had done, where the Romans had been, so they had historical facts to go by. So then they figured out that changes in sounds, sounds of language were regular, so that if a sound with a p had become b in another language, it had to always have become b, it was regular. P is always kind of a favorite example because the word father is pater in Latin. P has become an f, t has become th in English and this is true with Germanic languages--English is similar to German, Dutch, Danish, Norwegian, and so on.

Languages have all changed in different ways so that they're not necessarily mutually intelligible. If you know French or Spanish, you probably can manage some Italian, especially if you see it written. So then you know that the changes are regular changes--that p's always become f in the Germanic languages, t's become--well, then there is structure

to that because p, t, k are sounds that are sharp sounds, where you bring parts of your mouth together and release them rapidly, where m, for example is not. These are called "stops"--p, t, and k are called stops. Well, in the Germanic languages, the stops have turned to spirants, so that puh is fuh, tuh is thuh, and k's become h--it's a structural regularity. It goes across these same kinds of sounds. That's what structuralists look for.

Riess: What did they figure Sanskrit was?

M. Foster: They figured out that Sanskrit was the ancestor of languages in India, but not--Latin, Greek, and German couldn't possibly have come from Sanskrit. They came from an ancestor of both--all these languages which had changed in different ways. Each of these languages had its structural systems.

Riess: Doing a grammar for every American Indian language, one of the points is to find out the patterns of movement of the people?

M. Foster: Well, that's one good reason. Another good reason is that all of culture is filtered through language. So that the language and the culture are very closely intertwined, and sociocultural anthropology deals with societies and culture. So that there has to be a tie between the way the language operates and the way the culture operates. They're not disassociated.

Following Opportunities to Work in Linguistics

Riess: If you had not stumbled onto the opportunity to work on language with the Popoluca, would you have become a linguist?

M. Foster: I don't think so. I had spent a couple of years in Europe, and I spoke fluent French, and pretty good German, and reasonably good English because my parents were both writers, and I came from a newspaper family, and so people were using language professionally all the time. So there was that background. And I took Latin in high school--but I had not been very good at Latin, and things like the ablative absolute were absolutely beyond me. [laughs] So I don't think I would have.

I liked languages because they were a key to culture. I loved French. I took one year of Spanish in high school, but that didn't do me very much good. In college I took Greek. So I had had quite a good language background, but I don't think I would have had any particular reason to become a linguist.

Riess: You wanted to do graduate work in anthropology--I wonder what you would have chosen.

M. Foster: I'd have gone on doing social/cultural anthropology. I don't call myself a linguist, I call myself a cultural or symbolic anthropologist, even though my Ph.D. is in linguistics. A lot of American linguists who have worked with American Indian languages are anthropologists. I feel as if I'm an anthropologist first, because I'm really interested in a whole culture, I'm not just interested in a language.

I've worked with George in Tzintzuntzan, which is Spanish-speaking. I did my dissertation on Tarascan; I did field work for a number of years on Tarascan to write my dissertation. Tzintzuntzan has some Tarascan speakers, but not very many. It used to be the capital of the Tarascan empire at the time of the Spanish conquest. It was not as big as the Aztec empire, but it was getting there. It was busy conquering other people, so it was quite a booming thing when the Spaniards came along and took over.

But because it was Spanish-speaking, and because I was so interested in all the rituals and customs and what everybody did--daily life--in Tzintzuntzan, that's what I was doing. And George and I always came back at the end of the day, and sat at our typewriters typing up our notes and trying to remember what we'd learned that day. George has got this tremendous file of notes on Tzintzuntzan--a lot of which is mine. I've written some articles on Tzintzuntzan, but I have not done as much, certainly, as George.

Riess: When you go back to visit Tzintzuntzan, as you have over the years, do you go back looking at language?

M. Foster: No. I don't have time. In recent years we haven't made long stays. In the earlier years, we would stay for several months at a time, and then I would go out every day. It would take about half an hour or forty minutes to walk from Tzintzuntzan to my little village. I would go out and work all morning with my informants there and come back.

Riess: And you worked at getting the informants to tell you stories?

M. Foster: No. I mostly worked on grammatical things because the grammar was so difficult. Fortunately Popoluca was much simpler than Tarascan. Tarascan is a completely suffixing language. Short root and lots of suffixes, so that you can have a whole sentence in a verb that gets clarified by the other words that you throw in, so it makes it more specific. So any verb is a

very generalized thing, but with lots of different meanings, and it was a very complex task to figure out all of this suffixing system, so I had to have masses of examples to work it out.

I could get along with Popoluca, but I have quite a few texts that I worked on to make sure that I knew what every part of those texts came from. The upshot is that I remember Popoluca much better than I remember Tarascan. I think if I'd gone back for another month, I'd have been speaking pretty fluent Popoluca. I've never gotten so I could speak Tarascan.

Riess: I'm wondering why it was easier for you to remember the Popoluca. It has nothing to do with the fact that it's the first one you learned?

M. Foster: It's hard for me to be sure, but my guess is if we'd gone into a Tarascan village with no knowledge at all of Tarascan, and were there as short a time as we were with the Popoluca, I never could have gotten the grammar. That's my guess. I don't know. Also, the sound system is more difficult in Tarascan.

People will tell you that no language is more difficult than another, and this is true in a certain sense. But in terms of the details, trying to figure out the details, Tarascan is certainly much more difficult. Tarascan is completely suffixing. Navajo, for example, is completely prefixing, so they're just absolute opposites of each other. Both of them string together a whole series of morphemes to make whole words, but in opposite ways, so that's one reason that languages are so fascinating.

More on the Linguistics Department

Riess: One of the reasons you got into anthropology was because Herskovits was so excellent. In graduate school in Berkeley in linguistics, were any of your professors of that caliber?

M. Foster: The answer is no.

Riess: Does that mean that Herskovits was extraordinary, or was it the fact that he was the person who introduced you to this field? Maybe as an older student you couldn't be that easily impressed?

M. Foster: Well, that's possible. I do think he was extraordinary. But I think if it had been somebody who had done extensive fieldwork in a very different kind of culture, as Herskovits had in Africa and the New World, and was full of detailed descriptions and was able to speak about it as vividly, I think I probably might have felt the same way about somebody else. But most professors don't have that ability. I went to Columbia for a year and I didn't have any professor there that I thought was of that caliber.

I had this sort of epiphany with Herskovits, where I realized that this was made for me: this was a field that I didn't know existed; here was something you could study and actually work on that was so exciting and that was such an unusual and basic kind of thing. That stayed with me.

The next epiphany--it was kind of an epiphany when I was introduced to Indo-European and comparative grammar of Indo-European--the fact that sound change was regular. That was an epiphany, but it wasn't an epiphany because of the way it was taught. It could have been taught so much better, so much more interestingly than Madison Beeler taught it. I liked Beeler just fine, but I didn't think that he organized that course in a way that gave it real intellectual excitement. That I had to get out of it on my own.

I think Beeler was definitely enthusiastic about his subject. We had to write a term paper, and I picked a topic that was pretty difficult because there wasn't much done on it, so I had to figure it pretty much out for myself, and I think he was kind of surprised by my paper, but he liked it. I don't think it was exactly what he intended, though I can't tell you exactly what he intended, but I had that feeling all along that he was sort of startled by the way I handled it. I don't feel as if my mind worked at all the way his did. But he really was someone who knew Indo-European, which was good. So, if a professor knows a subject, I suppose he can teach it not very inspirationally, but can still be very beneficial to you.

Riess: Who were the best in the department?

M. Foster: Well, Mary Haas. I have a hard time disassociating the professors with the subjects that they taught. I suppose I was interested in Sanskrit, but Emeneau--I never worked so hard on a course in my life, if that's an indication of anything, because he made us in one semester go through the whole of Sanskrit, and it meant that you had to spend every night just struggling over your Sanskrit in order to stay abreast, so it was extremely difficult.

And I guess that--I'm probably super critical. When Dell Hymes got there--now Dell I'm sure is a good teacher in lots of ways, but this was a laboratory class in which we tackled an Indonesian language and simply had to work it out in the class, try to analyze the language. So he didn't do much teaching, the class just simply worked on this. I was good at that class because I'd written a grammar before that. So I could make some good analyses because I found some problems that I'd earlier struggled with myself--the same type of thing.

Riess: What are your recollections of your fellow graduate students? Did you study together a lot? Was it collegial?

M. Foster: Yes it was collegial. I don't think we studied together particularly, I suppose we did some, but I think most of our studying was just by ourselves in the library or at home or something.

Riess: Did you do it in the regular period of time, or did you take a few more years because of all your other responsibilities?

M. Foster: No. It was about the same, I think. I did it when my children were away from home most of the time. But it did take a lot of time. And I can remember particularly translating Sanskrit in the evenings after supper. I wouldn't be able to do that now! [laughs]

Riess: Are you still in touch with the group that you went through graduate school with?

M. Foster: Not really. Some of them have gone on to be in anthropology departments and go to the anthropology meetings, so I see them there. They're mostly teaching in the east or someplace different from me, so I don't see them. There aren't any of them out here that I see. Bill Shipley used to be down in Santa Cruz, and I did run into him occasionally.

Riess: And Harvey Pitkin.

M. Foster: Harvey Pitkin is at Columbia. Dell Hymes is still active--he's at the University of Virginia--he's probably emeritus now. I do see him at the meetings.

Riess: The work that you're doing now on language prehistory--is it a logical outgrowth of what you were interested in graduate school?

M. Foster: It is for me, but it wouldn't be for anybody else, because nobody else is doing it. I've just been doing my own thing,

but it just may be that I'm just like that. That I just take different directions than other people--I'm kind of peculiar. It's a logical outgrowth of my interest in language and the fact that I'm interested in comparing things. I've focused on comparing languages, so that's been the thrust of everything I've been doing in the last thirty years.

Riess: Did George encourage you in your graduate studies?

M. Foster: Well, he was always very supportive. I don't know that he was particularly encouraging, but he was not discouraging. I mean he knew that this was something that I wanted to do, so he wasn't about to--after all, George and I had started out together, and when we were at Northwestern, we were about equally good students, and both equally interested in the subject matter. The reason he got ahead of me was because we began having kids pretty soon, and that took a good deal of my time and energy.

One thing about it, though, is that although we started out linguistically together with Popoluca, he never kept up his linguistic interest. He did the phonological part of the grammar, and I did the rest, so he never struggled with the problems I struggled with. He, however, published the stories in his translations, which were not terribly good translations in the sense that he didn't know the structure of the language, so he didn't quite--he took what the informant had said, you know, telling the story in Spanish, which doesn't really reflect--if I'd known as much as I know now about language and what you could do with translation, I wouldn't have been satisfied with what he did.

Also, he did those papers, I think, before I had finished working out the grammar, so I would have wanted--and I still would like to, but I don't have time, I'm doing other things--to take those stories and do an interlinear translation, that would really reflect what I know about the grammar. I won't ever do that, but they are wonderful stories. It's a terrific collection of stories. Maybe someday someone will do it.

A Comparative Science, of Trivia

M. Foster: You were questioning whether it was scientific. I thought I should tell you that in the American Association for the

Advancement of Science anthropology and linguistics are both subfields in the organization, so if the AAAS considers linguistics to be scientific, it also considers anthropology to be scientific, or it wouldn't include them.

Riess: Yes, and yet I think of language as such a humanities thing.

M. Foster: Well, it is. That's the thing about both anthropology and linguistics, they fall in between these two schools. And there is no good reason why you shouldn't think of anything as scientific; as long as you study it in a scientific way it's science. If you study it in an impressionistic sort of way where you aren't really marshaling the facts, then it's not scientific.

You can't do experiments with astronomy, you just observe. And that's what you do with anthropology. You can't really do experiments with language either. Well, some--you can do psycholinguistics, you can do some experiments, but anthropology, you just have to see what people do, and you can observe what the regularities are in what people do.

When I was teaching at Hayward, I used to use meals as a good example. We eat certain things for breakfast, certain things for dinner--lunch can be a little less formalized. We know that with breakfast we start with our fruit and move into eggs, or cereal, and we don't have dessert. At dinner, if we have a long meal we like to start with soup. Soup is probably something you always put at the beginning. In China, soup comes last. So there are different rules to what you do with meals in China or any place else than in American. America is pretty much like England. In fact, all of Europe is somewhat the same, but France used to start with string beans.

Riess: In season.

M. Foster: In season. I don't know--it seemed to me that string beans were always in season in France. They were so good, so much better than our string beans, and it was always the first course. So even in similar cultures you can have somewhat different traditions.

Riess: And when does salad appear, for instance?

M. Foster: Well, California style, salad used to be first. In most of the rest of the country it used to be on a little plate beside your dinner plate. European tradition is to follow the main course with a salad, and that's something we took over from Europe--but California hadn't had it first.

Riess: Do people study this?

M. Foster: That's the kind of thing anthropologists think about, the comparative: what's different, what's the same.

##

M. Foster: Anthropology is a comparative science. In the field you're so struck by the differences with what you do at home, what you're expected to do at home, that those are the things you notice. This is one of the main reasons that anthropologists used to be encouraged to study some society other than their own: they were too familiar with their own so that the trivialities didn't make any difference, they couldn't see something that was different or interesting to study or even to think about. It was too "trivial."

That's a trouble that graduate students going into the field have. They don't know to notice things. They have to learn to think, "Oh, that's unusual, so it must be something interesting." That's the comparative part of anthropology. Just like linguistics, it's the comparative aspect that makes it so interesting. If everybody did the same thing, it wouldn't be interesting.

Riess: [describes the surprise of foreigners at the ubiquitous appearance of raisins in cereals and muffins in America]

M. Foster: You can do a cultural history of raisins, because in my childhood, cereal had no raisins. Raisins were something--bran cereal didn't have raisins. Oh, maybe somebody made raisin bran, but it certainly wasn't a common thing. So raisins were not something--you probably had some raisins in your pudding. But other than that, raisins weren't used very much. So raisins have an interesting history and it would be interesting to follow it up. You'd have to go back and look at what happened agriculturally with raisins, and why people started producing more raisins.

But you see this is trivia--as I used to say to students, anthropology is the study of trivia, the things that you don't think are important that turn out to be important. However, we haven't gotten me teaching yet. [laughs]

VIII REFLECTIONS ON ANTHROPOLOGY, AND PEACE AND CONFLICT

[Interview 7: March 29, 2000] ##

Structuralism, Relativism, and Self-Awareness

M. Foster: [talking about writing] I wake early, long before it's time to get up, and I lie in bed and have interesting and useful thoughts about things I want to write, and need to write, and how to frame things. It's a difficult problem. Writing is not really that easy if you really want to say things in good ways. [tape interruption]

I have an axe to grind against anthropologists because they have confused structuralism as a theoretical topic with the work that Lévi-Strauss has done. So that Lévi-Strauss became something that they were having a very hard time understanding, and they didn't think he was getting anywhere because they didn't think he was coming to any kind of point that was really relevant to anthropology. But for me as a structuralist, having gotten my toehold into linguistics—and he did too, he wasn't a linguist but he was very much influenced by structural linguistics, so he began applying the thing to mythology and folklore. He did kind of a comparative thing where he was comparing folktales in one period or one locale—he was mostly working in South America—and he could see resemblances between folktales that weren't the same folktale. He was working with transformations, to see how this folktale had transformed itself into something else.

I find it very, very interesting. I think it's very lasting as far as methodology is concerned, except that anthropologists began to reject it. They began tarring all of structuralism with the same brush of their gripe against Lévi-Strauss, and so it made them throw out the baby with the bathwater, reject the whole notion of structure, which is really just what anthropology needed, not to have it thrown out

but to retain it and improve it and to think about it! But they stopped thinking about it.

And then they began thinking that anthropologists had been acting as if culture was unchanging, there was no process going on. This was good, I mean it's good to begin thinking about process. They thought that structuralism was not dynamic, but there isn't any reason that structuralism can't be thought of in a dynamic way. But they began thinking that anthropologists also didn't put themselves into the situation, because obviously just by being there and having informants and talking to people they were changing the structure. That was useful too. But what it did was really to make people think that what had gone before was not valid, because the anthropologists hadn't been noticing the extent to which they were mixed up in it.

[Foster asks to have the tape-recorder turned off]

M. Foster: I have come to a lot of conclusions myself about my work, but I haven't written it up enough. I don't really care whether it gets out there in my lifetime--the other day I was thinking about clothes, because a friend came in in the morning and she said, "Oh, you're so color-coordinated, even now when you are just at home and you're not expecting anybody." [laughs] I said, "Don't you get up and get color-coordinated?" And she said, "No." And then I thought--I like color, I don't dress for other people, I dress for myself. I don't like to go around being in colors that clash with each other; I like to be harmonious. I have some kind of aesthetic sense, that even though I can't be beautiful, I like to be harmonious.

I am sort of that way about my research, too. I don't care that much how people react to me now, but I would like to leave some kind of record so that it would be useful later on for people, because I have gotten over a lot of intellectual humps that other people haven't even approached. I'd like to be able to get it down sufficiently so that other people can use it. So, that's a problem when you get to be my age, and especially when you have cancer when you are my age. You just don't know how much time you've got.

I've had two assistants. The first one didn't have any linguistic background, but she began to catch on while she was working. This one is very smart, too, and very eager and willing, but she told me she doesn't pay any attention to what the sense is, she's just getting it down accurately. So she hasn't thought it through, it hasn't captured her imagination, and so it isn't something I can really discuss with her. All I

can do is present her with material and tell her what to do next. So that is not as much fun for me.

Riess: Are you in correspondence with other scholars working on the same questions?

M. Foster: Just a few who are working on things very peripherally. Nobody is doing what I'm doing. It's a very isolating thing. But I don't think that matters too much to me. I think I'm kind of a hermit anyway, in lots of ways. I like to just be quietly doing my own thing, not having other people jumping in and telling me what I should be doing instead, or how I should be doing it.

Riess: When you make a general statement about how anthropologists "feel" about something, as earlier when we were talking about structuralism, it is interesting that you can say that confidently, because anthropologists strike me as being all over the map in their directions and interests.

M. Foster: It has gotten more fragmented. When George and I got into it it was very much a unified sort of thing, even though there were a lot of different aspects to it. Even the four fields are controversial now--the biological anthropologists have sort of hived off here at Cal. Linguistic anthropology has been dying out in many anthropology departments. The Stanford department has had a big split and divided into two departments. So recently there has been a big split, though there are still enough of us that are trying to battle this and trying to show younger anthropologists why it is valuable to keep the field together. But it is broad, it's the study of humankind, and it takes in everything!

Riess: When semiotics began to be a field of study did that change linguistic anthropology?

M. Foster: That really didn't come along in anthropology, that came along in--I guess it's philosophy. Charles Sanders Peirce was a philosopher. Some anthropologists did embrace it, but not a large group of anthropologists. It is a way of thinking about categories in language, but it's peripheral. Everybody uses Peirce's terminology, recognizes that Peirce thought in very useful terms, but there aren't many anthropologists who would call themselves semioticians. So I haven't paid that much attention to it.

To me the main thing about anthropology is that it is a comparative discipline, and it doesn't matter whether you are comparing something in the past with something in the present,

or whether you are comparing across the cultures globally or next door or what, or whether as an anthropologist you are comparing your own experiences with the experiences that you are undergoing, or seeing other people have when you are in the field. Really it is fieldwork that has made anthropology a discipline that has been united in the four fields sort of way. And especially doing fieldwork in parts of the world that are unfamiliar because you discover that there are such extraordinarily different patterns, structures, in the way people operate their lives and in terms of rules that they digest as they are growing up, and take for granted.

That's the thing about it: that as an anthropologist you find out that your own culture is not something to take for granted. I think in a way this has created a kind of relativism that has spread outside of anthropology in a sort of a bad way. Because anthropology looks at things in a relative way, that doesn't mean that you should begin thinking that every way of living is equal to every other way.

Riess: Can you think of a time when this became most an issue, this cultural relativism?

M. Foster: I think it has been very gradual, a seeping outside of anthropology. But anthropologists are always complaining that they don't publish enough for the general public, that they are just writing for each other. Margaret Mead made a difference because she did try to publicize anthropology.

Riess: That is an issue in the field, that anthropologists don't make the effort?

M. Foster: Very much so, right now. Anthropologists like to talk to each other. I enjoy talking to anthropologists more than other people, if they're not these deconstructionist kinds of anthropologists. But I think that is fading a little. I think it's getting a little more back to--not to the past, but to a way of looking at human nature, human behavior, human belief systems, as interrelated in a comparative sense, so that it is important to study them. You're not just studying them for nothing; you're studying them for comparative reasons.

Riess: I am struck by how self-aware anthropologists have to be, in their role of looking at other cultures, how aware of their own basic assumptions. You understand what I mean.

M. Foster: Yes, and it makes me start thinking about tourism. It used to be, when George and I were first doing fieldwork, we'd go to places like Mexico and go out into areas of Mexico--there

wasn't too much tourism in Mexico in those days, and it was hard to get around, so that the places that we would go would be new and fresh and we would know very little about them. But then even as tourists not doing fieldwork, if we went to places that were strange to us we tried to behave in ways that would not disrupt the local life, or make people feel that we were rude. Because there are lots of ways of being that we're accustomed to that are even polite in our society but are considered very rude in other societies. So you become self-conscious in that sense, you watch your step until you've learned.

When you go into the field it's very important--you aren't going to be able to carry out good fieldwork if you don't get people to trust you. And people aren't going to trust you if you are always making social mistakes that are very abhorrent to them. You have to be very cautious to not shock people. You know, even with your good friends every now and then there is some kind of a remark that hurts somebody's feelings or disrupts the friendship.

Riess: How is this taught?

M. Foster: It's not taught, you just gradually work through it.

An anthropologist working in South America [Kalervo Oberg] first talked about culture shock. Now culture shock has gotten to be one of these buzz phrases that everybody bats around. But it isn't always used correctly. It's the kind of shock that you feel when you are among a strange people who have strange ways that you don't understand, and you feel out of sync with everybody. It's a very strange, difficult feeling.

Anthropologists working in the field have to work their way through culture shock. I doubt if there is any anthropologist who goes into a very different society who doesn't feel estranged with no backing or no familiarity with what other people are thinking.

Riess: And the other part of it is, how well you understand your own culture, the culture that is your growing-up habituated culture?

M. Foster: It makes you understand your own culture a lot better if you have something to compare it with. If you don't have anything to compare it with it's just like the air you breathe; you're just so used to it. It doesn't occur to you that there is any

pattern to it whatsoever--that you are operating according to rules.

Riess: Often when you go into a new culture you need information and yet you can't ask direct questions. That seems very difficult.

M. Foster: Well, of course you are observing all the time what's going on, and you're puzzled about why people are doing what they're doing, and what it means to them. And the longer you're there the more it becomes something that you grasp. But you see I lived through that in France, and Austria. So it wasn't a totally strange phenomenon to me. And I wasn't asking questions; I was just trying to live the life according to the French family that I was living with.

If you are at all sensitive to what other people are doing or thinking, or what their facial expressions are, I guess, you begin to modify your behavior a little bit so that they'll understand you better, and that way you get to understand them better. You know, it's an interactive kind of thing. And that's the same thing when you go into the field, although in the field if you're going to someplace that is more strange, the customs are more different than if you go to France, you have more work to do on it. It's the same kind of thing; it's just at a higher degree.

Of course nowadays a lot of people are studying aspects of their own culture because our culture is so varied. If you go to a small village in Mexico people are pretty much operating in the same way; they live at the same level, their jobs are not specialized, everybody's doing pretty much the same kind of thing. But here we are so varied and there are so many different fields people are in.

For instance--Stanley Brandes is studying alcoholism now in Mexico. He's working with Alcoholics Anonymous groups. If he was doing that here--he understands enough about what goes on here so that he can compare that with the groups in Mexico, and he finds extraordinary differences. So that's what I mean about it being a comparative thing.

Riess: More on the self-awareness. Was there ever a belief in the profession that anthropologists should be psychoanalyzed?

M. Foster: Back in the days when Freudianism was less known and less criticized, people often did feel that it would be useful to have some analysis. But I don't think that anthropologists particularly dove into analysis. Kroeber did, of course, but he was in a period where people were thinking more about the

uses of psychoanalysis. But now--I don't know, people don't go around telling you they have been psychoanalyzed.

Riess: It is interesting. Psychoanalysis is a sort of fieldwork on yourself.

M. Foster: Yes, and I got into it because I wasn't satisfied with myself, not because of anthropology.

Riess: Did it make you a better anthropologist?

M. Foster: I suppose so, in a way. It made me more aware of the kind of personality problems that I have and that other people have. It made me more tolerant. So it certainly has its uses. I really feel as if it--you discover that you are a kind of a closed book to yourself, and it's good to open the book a little.

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Riess: Have you been interested in the study of consciousness?

M. Foster: To some extent. It goes off into areas that I don't find particularly useful. I did give a paper at one anthropology meeting in a session on the anthropology of consciousness--I can't tell you what my paper was about, or what it said, it was some years back. But I did get interested in it then. It was when it was kind of new, and I wanted to explore it, but I didn't find it useful enough to keep focusing on it.

AAAS Committee on Science, Arms Control, and National Security

Riess: [subject changes to consideration of "good communication," and the relativism of the term. Riess uses it as a lead-in to the subject of peace and conflict, and the work Foster has done in that field.]

M. Foster: I served for several years on a committee of the AAAS during the cold war that had to do with nuclear weaponry, the Committee on Science and Arms Control and National Security. And I found it terribly frustrating because all they wanted to talk about was technological problems of armaments and the nuclear race and "throw-weight." As a social scientist I found it very difficult to find it even useful, not just for me but for the field in general.

It seemed to me that the way to tackle it was to try to get down to broader, more fundamental questions than all these quarrels over technology and how it was being used. I was very glad when my three-year term was over. That wasn't what I wanted to do with my interest in peace and conflict. But I had gotten into it because I had become interested in conflict. Why do we have conflict? Why is conflict sustained? What are the mechanisms by which people resolve conflict?

You obviously have to start with particulars, and then work into greater generalizations. But that committee just dwelt so hard on particulars. I couldn't see that it was useful, and I couldn't get my point across, so I didn't feel as if they and I had much to say to each other.

Riess: Was it a humanities-science divide?

M. Foster: They weren't scientists necessarily. If they'd been academicians I think I would have had more rapport with them. No, they were people in governmental jobs and Pentagon jobs, various kinds of things advisory to the government.

Riess: Why were you appointed to the committee?

M. Foster: I co-authored two books on peace and conflict, and I think the first one had come out before I went on the committee.

The International Peace Academy, and PACT

Riess: Tell me why you began to work in peace and conflict issues?

M. Foster: Well, I was a member of the Town and Gown Club in Berkeley [since 1958]. My mother was a member, and friends of my mother and my friends who were in Town and Gown persuaded me to join--rather reluctantly, I'm not terribly much of a club person.

But I have enjoyed a lot of the lectures, the speakers, and one of them was Norman Cousins. Norman Cousins gave an extremely good and interesting talk that frightened everybody to death about the nuclear threat. And when he finished talking, in the question period, Elsie McMillan, whose husband was a Nobel Prize winner in physics and had worked on the atomic bomb, raised her hand and said, "This is all very well, but what can just ordinary people do, people like us?" (Although she wasn't particularly ordinary, it was she who put this question.)

And he said, "Well, I can point out to you the person that I think has done the most, the lay person who has done more for the cause than anybody I can think of, and she just happens to be here today as a guest, and her name is Ruth Forbes Young. She founded the International Peace Academy." He said, "Ruth, would you stand up?" And she stood up--she was sitting way over on the side of the room.

When the question period ended I rushed over to talk to Ruth Young, to ask her about this organization. And three other people also did: Carol Sibley was one, and Julie Jurs, and Elizabeth Ratcliff. The four of us went over and began talking to Ruth about the Peace Academy, and we were so taken with the things that Ruth said, and all so driven by a need to do something about this terrible situation, that we got together and formed a little organization called PACT. It was a local thing to get--you see, people weren't really thinking about these issues, and we were trying to get them to think about it. One result of that was we gave benefits for the Peace Academy.

Riess: PACT was to raise funds?

M. Foster: PACT was to make people conscious of the issues, and to sponsor talks, to get people involved. We had zeroed in on the Peace Academy because of Ruth, and Ruth spent part of the year here and part of the year in Philadelphia. She was an East Coaster.

Riess: Did the Peace Academy have a Quaker basis or any orientation like that?

M. Foster: Not at all.

The Peace Academy in New York is very close to the United Nations, and had close ties to the United Nations. But people --it is international. They had lots of people. It was one of the first organizations to begin working on this topic.

So we had speakers out here from the Peace Academy, and other speakers. We sponsored different things.

Riess: Did they do studies?

M. Foster: They do lots of studies. They put out symposia at different levels. It's a very active, going organization. Still is, and I still contribute to it.

So, that was that beginning. I had become more and more concerned about the world and the way the world was going, and

concerned that people weren't paying enough attention to it. Also I wanted to see if there wasn't some way I could use my anthropological background to contribute to the understanding. I felt that if more people understood what was going on, they might be able to contribute to the solutions. If they are not paying attention, they obviously are not going to make any contribution.

It was a time in which "peace" was a naughty word. When we formed this little organization called PACT, Tom Blaisdell, who was a professor here at Cal, said to me, "Mickie, that's just fine, but you can't call it 'peace,' you can't talk about 'peace.'" Times have changed so much since then that 'peace'--everybody talks about 'peace.' But in those days, if you talked about 'peace' they'd call you a "peacenik." The whole climate of opinion was very different.

Riess: We'll pick up that whole story more fully next time.

International Travels and the Local Languages

Riess: I'd like to hear about your foreign travels with George when he was going on AID or WHO missions. I wondered whether you resented being pulled along on those trips. I think of Dorothea Lange, who went with Paul Taylor when he was on AID missions, and how she resisted, but also found it inspirational for her photography.

M. Foster: Well, she didn't go along with Paul when Paul went along with George; they went off together. And neither did I, and that was when I got acquainted with Dorothea, when George and Paul were doing this collaborative work. I knew Dorothea quite well. And my father had known Dorothea and Paul in Washington. They were among his acquaintances in the New Deal, because Dorothea was taking photographs.

Riess: Tell me about Dorothea. Did you find her sympathetic?

M. Foster: I think Dorothea was a terribly interesting person, but I could see that she had her difficult side, too. I enjoyed her very much, and Paul, too. But Paul--I felt more drawn to Paul in a certain way. Intellectually I was drawn to Dorothea. You know some people you have a quick feeling of rapport with and others you don't. I think Dorothea liked me and I liked her, but we weren't just exactly soul mates--not that I was a soul mate to Paul, either.

But I had lots of things to talk to Dorothea about, and one was photography. I told you that my father was a semi-professional photographer. Or a very high-level amateur photographer.

Riess: For you, to go off on those long stays in foreign countries with George, was that being a good wife--I mean, I know that was part of the reason Dorothea accompanied Paul.

M. Foster: No. I mean, it was being a good wife, but it wasn't something I didn't want to do. It was just something I normally would have done. George would get these assignments in different countries that would give us an opportunity to be in places that were exotic to us. Not just as tourists, but as people who had time to poke around and get acquainted. And we had local acquaintanceship through the people that George was working with.

It was an anthropological experience for me and for George too. Especially those five months that we spent in Northern Rhodesia. He was being taken around the country by the district commissioners, so we visited a lot of different tribes, if you want to call them that, groups of people, in different parts of Northern Rhodesia, which became Zambia later but was undergoing the throes of the shift from British rule at that time. We had a wonderful opportunity to observe the interactions between the district commissioners in the areas and the local people. It was pretty disillusioning for both of us, about the Colonial roles of the Brits.

Riess: Did George call on your particular sensibilities in these observations? A second set of eyes?

M. Foster: I think he used my sensibilities only in the sense that we discussed all of this, and we were witnessing the same things. Especially in Northern Rhodesia I was almost always where he was, so we saw the same people and the same events. Later on, in Southeast Asia, he was mostly going to people's offices to talk; he wasn't out in the field that much. But in Northern Rhodesia he was.

We lived in the India International Center every time we went to India. That is a place that foreign people, academics or governmental people can join and have rooms there. It's a very nice place in a beautiful garden. Did George talk about that?

Riess: No.

M. Foster: George just loved the garden because it was full of birds. We'd go out early in the morning and watch the birds. And they had entertainments in the evening, often.

They also had a little library that I enjoyed very much because I found a lot of linguistic sources there. So I was working in that sense, in that I was doing research in the library. Also, when we were in Northern Rhodesia I tackled the language--one of the languages, because there are many languages. This language was called Tonga and I got an informant and I worked with him and accumulated quite a bit of data, which I did nothing with, but I was interested in it.

It was a useful experience because it was a tonal language, like Chinese. Words which from a phonological standpoint are identical, but the tone, whether you raise or lower your voice, makes a difference in the meaning. I was trying to understand that. It was easy enough to understand it in terms of the individual words, but when you got into phrases, sentences, it had rules that were very difficult to try and understand. Anyone who works with the tonal systems has the same problem. It was very difficult, so it was a good experience, actually.

I have been fortunate in having experience in analysis of a variety of languages with very different structures. In a graduate seminar at Berkeley we tackled an Indonesian language --Sudanese. And when I was in India too I was working to a certain extent on Hindi, and in Nepal on Nepali. I was trying to analyze these languages so that I had a comparative grasp of their structures. Every language has a completely different structure, so you have to try to understand how it is put together: what rules it operates under.

[tape interruption]

Work in Language Prehistory. Importance of Analogy¹

M. Foster: I have been working on this task of understanding how language started and how it evolved, which gets me involved with human evolution. Basically I am doing what linguists think can't be done, and that is to work far back in time on the beginnings of

¹See Appendices for a supplemental interview with Foster on her language origins research.

language. So when you talk about consciousness this ties, for me, into human evolution. What's different about the way human beings operate consciously from the way other animals operate?

I have a very organized theory about this, but it's based completely on the fact that human beings recognize things as having likeness to each other. And so analogy is the key to the whole thing, as far as I'm concerned. Animals use analogy to recognize what's dangerous from what's not dangerous, or what's food and what's not food. Obviously they have to see things as like and different or they can't do that. So there are certain things that seem dangerous to them because they have been through other threats, so that they think, oh, this is like that. Or they unconsciously relate that in some way. But it is using analogy in some sort of way.

We always thought that monkeys could imitate, but further studies show that monkeys can't. Even great apes are not very good at imitation. Mimicry has to be there to a certain extent, but it's very limited in other primates. It's better in primates than it is in other animals, but it's better in birds than in primates. Birds do quite a lot of mimicking, as we know. I've just acquired this book about the grey parrot that has been trained by a scholar named Irene Pepperberg. The parrot can recognize words, operate just as well with words as the great apes can. The book has just come out. I haven't read it yet, but I am fascinated by this bird. These aspects of consciousness--what's going on in this little bird brain that makes the little bird able to indicate things that are spoken about, showing that it recognizes what the word means?

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M. Foster: Animals can learn representations, but only if some advantage or disadvantage has accrued to knowing this. That's why apes have to be trained by giving them rewards all the time. If they are given a reward when they get it right then they may begin to remember it, if it happens over and over.

So that's the use of analogy, the sort of cause and effect use of analogy. But they have really no understanding of conceptual generalization, categories, where language is completely based on categories. If I say "table" I'm not talking about this table, I'm talking about any one of the number of a group of objects that has the same general shape and function. This is not something that animals can learn to do, except on a very minor scale.

Language is nothing but categories. If you can't learn categories beyond a very limited degree, having to learn because of survival reasons, eating or danger or something like that--this is where the great divide is between animals and humans. If you divorce humans from the animal category, which of course you can't do completely.

Riess: When you look at languages over the world, over time, are some more able to think abstractly, in categories, than others?

M. Foster: No. I think you think more abstractly probably if you go through an elaborate educational system, because you have had to tackle more different fields and think about more different things. But if you work with informants in a very remote, rural place, people who have had very little experience with the outside world, they know their own environment very well, and they categorize that very well. So the capacity is there. For any normal, unhandicapped person.

Riess: When you read the book about the grey parrot, what will you be looking for?

M. Foster: I will be looking for the extent that the parrot uses analogy. I am very interested in human evolution, and in primate studies. I know pretty well what primates can do, and what dogs can do--I've had dogs, though I haven't tried to train dogs to any extent. And I've another book that I've just acquired that is a sort of synthesis of animal studies which I'm looking forward to reading, too. I'm sure I'm going to learn new things.

When I was in graduate school I was very taken with comparative linguistics. In the 19th century a group of linguists, largely German, I think most of them were German, began looking comparatively at Indo-European languages which could be seen to be related. For example, you can see rather quickly that German, Dutch, Norwegian, Swedish, these northern European languages are related to each other. That French and Spanish and Italian are related to each other. But the history of that is understood because of Latin, and because the Romans settled different parts of Europe so their language changed. The fact that it has changed--if you look at the changes you discover that there are regularities in the structure of the changes. That's the rock that comparative linguistics rests on: the regularity of change.

Indo-European has been reconstructed much more thoroughly than any other language family, pretty exhaustively, so that it is known how Sanskrit and Latin and Greek and all these various

languages--where they came from and what that language was like. But linguists for some reason have stopped with that and assert that you can't get any farther back in time than that. And I could never see any rationale for that belief, and so that's where I started in. I started looking at things globally.

Nowadays, every linguistic introductory textbook says that it can't be done, or lecturers will get up and say that. "It can't be done. This is impossible. It's too far back in time. Language has changed too much." But if you've established what Indo-European came from--what all these different languages that are called Indo-European languages started from--why can't you do that with other groups and compare those?

Riess: What are the arguments against it?

M. Foster: It's some kind of mind set. If you are told this long enough you believe it, and you don't really stop and think about it, and you can't get people to stop and think about it. It's a given. It's regularized to such an extent that it's part of the belief system.

Riess: And your interest in the birds and the primates?

M. Foster: That is important because language started because of the use of analogy. Because things were recognized as having likeness and named categories were formulated.

Riess: You are creating a theory of the evolution of language!

M. Foster: Yes! It's revolutionary.

Riess: And so of course you are interested in consciousness.

M. Foster: Yes, and you can see how I couldn't answer your question without going into this long discussion.

When people talk about consciousness they mean different things by it. It isn't just language they are talking about. My view of human consciousness as different from the consciousness of other creatures is that--people say that creatures have no consciousness in the sense that they can't think about their own thoughts. But they are certainly conscious in the sense that they are going about their business using their minds in whatever way they are capable of using their minds. So that's what I would call consciousness. And that consciousness for animals is very limited when it comes to

recognizing similarities between things, whereas human beings have come a long, long way, and a lot of it is because of language, even though language had to start in a very simple way through use of conceptualization which developed into something very complex and elaborated.

Riess: It seems hard to be working alone. Of course you must learn from the work of others in your field.

M. Foster: I learn a lot from any advances in the understanding of evolution, whether it's human evolution or animal evolution in general.

Riess: Physical anthropologists?

M. Foster: Well, yes, most evolutionary studies are done by physical anthropologists, or primatologists for humans. The reason anthropologists got into great ape studies was in order to compare other primates with human beings. This is what I am saying about anthropology being comparative--no matter what field of anthropology the four fields are always focused on.

The four fields--people are apt to say, well, that isn't all there is to it. But in a sense it is. Because physical, biological anthropology takes in a big wealth of material; linguistics, language is certainly global; archaeology is trying to understand the past from its remains wherever they are discovered, and also ties in very closely to biological anthropology because a lot of it is remnants of bones as well as artifacts--things people have made.

And cultural and social anthropology is the way people behave, the rules they live by. And that ties into archaeology too, because if you look at the artifacts that people have made and the way they have used them--archaeologists get better all the time at trying to understand the underlying cultural underpinnings. All these fields really need each other.

And I, looking at language and evolution, need them all. I'm kind of a living, breathing example of why you need four fields. Because of what I do I have to know what is going on in all the fields, I have to pay attention. I can't know everything, it makes too much reading. And that's why everything I do is slow because I have to absorb so much.

Riess: It sounds very hard.

M. Foster: Hard, but it's the most entertaining thing. It's the world's biggest puzzle. So if you like puzzles--.

Riess: But to know everything--.

M. Foster: You only have to know everything in a certain sense. What I meant is that you have to tie in to all these different aspects. And if I am looking for evidence of the use of analogy--which because I discovered by my work on language was the important thing--then I begin looking for examples of the use of analogy in other creatures.

Riess: Have you talked with Jane Goodall?

M. Foster: No. Have you talked to her?

Riess: I asked because of her work with primates. And I thought you might have met her.

M. Foster: I'm not doing primate studies, although I am interested in what they find out.

Anthropology Museum, Exhibitions and Labels

Riess: You and George had a lot to do with the anthropology museum here. And you mentioned that when you were in Paris after you married you visited anthropology museums?

M. Foster: When we were in Paris we did go and offer our services at the Musée de l'Homme, the Museum of Man in Paris. We worked sort of in the garret of the museum. They were reviewing objects that hadn't been looked at for a long time and that weren't properly catalogued, or that they wanted to see if they could refine catalogues and so on. We were not very useful, but we were helping with that. We would go to the museum every day, I guess--I can't quite remember how much time we spent there.

We asked, What happens to the artifacts after we've looked at them? Oh, they said, They just go back, nobody looks at them again, they're just there, part of the material that's stored. [laughter] We weren't particularly good at that, and I don't know that we contributed anything, but we kind of enjoyed it in a modest sort of way. It didn't make us want to be museum people!

George fell into being the director of the museum here for a while, because that was when he was--like the man who came to dinner, he was here without a job, a permanent job, he was here as a visitor, and they wanted to keep him but they had

no slot for him. And we wanted to stay. He was just temporary for three years, I think it was. What opened up first was the museum directorship, and he wasn't particularly interested in the museum but he took the job and did what he could do.

When George was director of the museum I got very interested in the exhibiting, mostly because it was so bad--and there was hardly any exhibiting at all. They had this very small space in a room with old cabinets using what I called the "burlap standard," which all museums had in the olden days--things in cases with minimal labels and the background was always burlap. I found these museums terribly boring; visually they were so uninteresting. I decided that it [the museum at Berkeley] could be improved, so I launched in and took over the job of improving it!

At that time most of the faculty felt that the museum was only for graduate students looking at sets of artifacts and things. The lay public didn't come to the museum. The undergraduates didn't use the museum. Well, I had a little crew of people, preparators, that helped me do the exhibits, and we took over a storefront outside of Sather Gate on Telegraph. It had been a shoe store. It was one of those stores that has glass cases that go in at kind of an angle to the door: a kind of a v-shaped entrance with glass cases. This was an empty store that the university was able to take over and use for exhibiting, and I had free rein with that, and I set up exhibits.

Riess: Had it been used before for exhibiting?

M. Foster: It hadn't been used before at all by the university. I don't remember how we got hold of it.

At first when I started out there were just a couple of those glass cases down in the entrance to the [Doe] Library--and one upstairs, I think--where they would have little exhibits of some artifacts, some special thing, but they were very small. They are still there, they still use them, I think. That was how I started, and then I branched out into the museum proper, which did have some of these old-fashioned cases with burlap backing.

When we came to Berkeley the anthropology department was getting ready--Kroeber Hall was being dreamed of. And George and I made a trip around the country looking at museums to get ideas about improvements in exhibiting and storage spaces. I was mostly looking at the exhibiting aspect, and George was

looking at the way museums could be laid out to function better.

The Milwaukee Museum was a wonderful example of good exhibiting, very advanced. The Field Museum was not-- . And the Peabody Museum in Boston was about as dismal as you could get. So museums really had not progressed much. In Europe they were doing better than in the States. People in the department thought this was not really what the anthropology museum should be doing, so we were kind of going against the current in trying to have an adequate exhibit space that was modernized.

Riess: The archaeologists would have been keener?

M. Foster: The archaeologists weren't the least bit interested. John Rowe for example felt that it was a total waste.

Riess: Why is that? Certainly the artifacts are interesting.

M. Foster: Oh yes, but as far as they are concerned they are only interesting for the people working on them, studying them. They may have changed their opinion since, I hope they have.

Riess: And then there is the matter of viewing material artifacts as aesthetic objects, things of beauty.

M. Foster: They weren't thought about that way. They were just interesting artifacts. For me they were both things of beauty and things of cultural interest. You needed to know what use was made of them, what they meant to the people who were using them.

I developed a theory of labeling that I still think is valid--but I didn't carry on with the field so it hasn't-- . I think labeling has improved to a certain extent, but labels used to be so small and dull, and you had to study so hard to figure what you were looking at, and they gave you very little information. It struck me that casual people coming along just want some kind of general idea what this is all about. And then there were people who had a little more elaboration of interest. And then people who really cared about things.

I developed a three-tier labeling system. Large labels would be for the general public, trying to get across general ideas of what this was all about. The next level would be trying to show some kind of interesting relationships between things and what they were used for. And then the final one, the third level, was giving much more specificity.

- Riess: This is done by type size?
- M. Foster: Yes, as well as larger print processes.
- Riess: The people who care most have to get closest to the case.
- M. Foster: Yes, hover over it and think about it. But most people aren't that involved.
- Riess: This wasn't interesting enough to pursue further for you?
- M. Foster: I could have, but when George was no longer the director I had no official capacity. They had no thought at that time of hiring anybody. So--I just had fun. And I put on some pretty good exhibits, several different shows in the storefront.

More on the Pursuit of Linguistics

[Interview 8: March 31, 2000] ##

- Riess: You were saying before we started today that in your life there are three dominant pursuits.
- M. Foster: In general, for my life as an anthropologist. First of all, I suppose we have to put linguistics, or linguistic anthropology, and that came about on our first field trip to Mexico to the Sierra Popoluca in the mountains of Veracruz when because the people were so suspicious we decided to tell them that we were there to study their language. It started there.

Then I spent a good deal of time in the 1940s and '50s on the little grammar we wrote on Popoluca, trying to learn enough about linguistics so that I could write that intelligently. We were living in Mexico, and we did actually go back to the Popoluca to check some of our data, because the thing we'd found was that although phonologically we were quite accurate, we had not been aware of the long vowels--it's because we have them in English, but we don't pay any attention to them, because it's just a matter of pronunciation whether we lengthen the vowels or don't. We do lengthen the vowels before what are called voiced consonants, and if you compare things like bat and bad--you see what I mean--the vowel is definitely lengthened in the latter and not the former. So I had to go

back and check all of the Popoluca vocabulary data--basically in the folktales I checked it, because that gave me the kind of clue that I needed for the vocabulary.

And that's the only time we ever went back to the Popoluca. Unfortunately. In hindsight, I think that we should have followed up and really studied the Popoluca. Partly the reason I'm saying this is that Thor Anderson, an anthropologist who's doing film-making, has been working on George's early movie that he took in Tzintzuntzan--it's about the material culture, which is agricultural techniques, pottery techniques and so on--he's been working on it and he's doing drafts, if you could call them that, of this film, which will be a video. But after we finished with that, George showed his film of the Popoluca, which of course was very early--1940 and '41, I think, that we were there and thinking about that.

And that film shows that it's so much more primitive than Tzintzuntzan, more different, let us say, from Western culture. The Tzintzuntzeños had a lot of Spanish/Mexican Spanish influence, where the Popoluca were quite isolated, and hardly saw white men at all. I mean they saw mestizos who were of mixed blood, but not people like George and me who were complete strangers and a surprise to them. So that was certainly the most primitive field experience George and I had, and we just barely scratched the surface. We were there such a short time.

Riess: So you think it would have also been a good candidate for a long term study?

M. Foster: Oh, it would have been a marvelous candidate, because it's changed so much now. We know it has changed, because we've talked to people who've been there. I've talked to a woman who was gathering folklore there, and she was telling me what some of the changes were. I found this extraordinarily interesting.

The last time we came near it, we drove down to the village center when George's mother and father and his aunt were visiting us, and we passed the road that led in. We used to have to go in on horseback, there was no road, so I realized that this village must have undergone tremendous change. I think that following that change would have been extraordinarily interesting.

Riess: But of course that you were so ambivalent about the people.

M. Foster: Yes. Well, my linguistic informant [Leandro Pérez] was extraordinarily good, cooperative, nice. We liked him very

much. In between the two times that we were there he had taken on a second wife, because this was a polygamous community. All of these things would have been so interesting to study and follow-up and we didn't have time on our first field trip to do that. Then of course, when we went back, George was assigned by the Institute of Social Anthropology to work in the Tarascan area, so we didn't really have any choice, but we could have worked it out somehow to go back there and do studies.

Of course, the changes in that time period were more extreme than they would have been later. Especially since sixty years have gone by since we did that field study.

Riess: You were saying there have been three dominant pursuits for you.

M. Foster: Yes, and that doesn't have anything to do with it, except that that's where my linguistic interest began. Because if you study an unknown language, and you have to figure out what's going on, what the grammatical rules are, what all of the structure is about, it changes your life; you have to think in a completely different way than you ever did before.

When we came out of the field is when structuralism had become dominant in linguistics. We didn't know anything about that, so when we came out, we actually audited some courses.² I was trying to learn from them because I was writing the Popoluca grammar.

Riess: Structuralism--that had come from Europe?

M. Foster: I think the base of it came from Ferdinand de Saussure, who was a French linguist--maybe Swiss, I guess he was Swiss, but he wrote in French--and Roman Jakobson. And there was a big Slavic influence in linguistics at one time. Structuralism in the United States really was identified most strongly with Leonard Bloomfield, who began formulating structural principles in language and had also studied American Indian languages to some extent, although he started out as an Indo-Europeanist--I guess you would call him a philologist.

Bloomfield had tremendous influence on the direction that American linguistics took. The first impetus was Boas, and then Kroeber who followed in Boas's footsteps as far as a linguistic interest was concerned. All Boas students felt the need to learn more about language. They had to record the

²See earlier discussion, p. 134.

languages of the people they were investigating, usually in rather short stands in the field, so they tried to take vocabularies, and do what they could.

Riess: Linguistic anthropology was much more integrated into one's whole experience as an anthropologist than it is now.

M. Foster: Yes. Definitely. Except that people didn't spend the long periods in the field that they began to do. That was certainly influenced by British anthropology, because England was a colonial power, and it had taken over these various parts of Africa and other places--Africa loomed pretty large for British anthropologists who'd go and spend a long time.

Riess: You could just move into some field station.

M. Foster: Yes. And they had colonial officers, and district commissioners, and provincial commissioners, and so on that were running the show. So for any anthropologist to come in was really quite easy, compared with going into a totally exotic place.

Riess: In any event, you immediately got a greatly enriched understanding of the study of linguistics when you came back from Mexico.

M. Foster: Because I had access to these anthropological linguists with whom I was good friends, so that I could discuss these things with them. That year we spent at UCLA--Harry Hoijer was one of our closest friends and I talked to him a great deal. All that time I was trying to get the material that we had gathered into shape--George worked on the phonology, and I worked on all of the grammar. And that meant that I worked on folktales that we'd collected very intensively, because the only way I could do the grammar was to figure out what things meant.

That was a long period of time when my major interest was linguistics and Sierra Popolucan in particular. I've thought a great deal about this, because I felt that if I went back to the Popolucan--we had only been there three or four months, extraordinarily short for the amount of material that we accumulated, and when I tell this to other anthropologists, they're astounded, they can't see how we did it! I don't know exactly how either--but we did, we worked at it. [laughs] Now I lost the train of that thought.

Riess: You're saying that when you came out of the field you were really introduced to both linguistics and structuralism.

M. Foster: Yes, and it led me into an interest both in linguistics, and structuralism and symbolism.

Sapir was an anthropologist who had linguistics and psychology as his major subfields within anthropology. I was very much influenced by Sapir, much more than by Bloomfield.

Riess: Did you know Sapir?

M. Foster: I never knew Sapir. I wished later that when I had gone to graduate school I had gone to study with Sapir. But Sapir died quite young, and the opportunity didn't present itself. In any event, because Sapir was an anthropologist he looked at things in a different way than Bloomfield. Sapir was also a structuralist, but a structuralist in a kind of a different way. I was influenced by Saussure and by Sapir. Those were probably the two major influences that got me really involved in linguistics.

When I went back to graduate school, I really had always intended to go get my Ph.D. in anthropology, but we had moved so much, we had such short stays here and there that I never could--well in Mexico it wouldn't have really been possible. We had a lot of--the anthropologists of Mexico were all our close friends too, because George was working at the Institute.

Riess: And you've explained why it just didn't seem appropriate to do anthropology at Berkeley because you knew all of those people.

M. Foster: Yes. And George was actually chairman of the department at that time, which made it kind of awkward. [tape interruption]

What we started saying before we got interrupted, or before I got off on this thing, was that there were three basic themes to my intellectual pursuits. One is language, which leads directly into structuralism, because language can be thought about in the most structural way of any field of anthropology, because it can be made static by being written down, so that you have the possibility of analyzing it in detail. It isn't ongoing the way that other kinds of human behavior are, which you can stop in their tracks with photography, but not in the same kind of way as writing systems. So language lends itself to a structural approach, and that's why structuralism started with linguistics. But it then spilled over into other aspects of anthropology.

I feel very badly now that anthropologists rejected structuralism--it's much more useful to think of cultures structurally as far as I'm concerned. I felt that this

[rejection] was because of Lévi-Strauss. Sometimes things get a bad name because they're associated with certain people or certain trends, and that kind of condemns the whole intellectual enterprise.

Riess: But there was a real discipline to it.

M. Foster: Oh, there was a tremendous discipline, and also facts--it's very empirical because facts are crucial, but you don't stop with a fact. I mean you base your whole theory on the way facts are organized, which seems to me so fruitful that to overlook that makes it become a branch of poetics or literature in general. And it takes away this wonderful side of it that to me is the most interesting thing about it--not to say it's the most interesting thing for everybody. It's really what began to make anthropology scientific. You see that language and structuralism are very closely identified for me.

Returning to the Discussion of Conflict and Non-Conflict

Riess: Last interview we began to talk about your deep involvement in a professional way with issues of peace and conflict.

M. Foster: Yes. That is the other thing that has preoccupied me intellectually, the problem of conflict and non-conflict--peace--it's hard to define peace. It's even sort of hard to define war, because as anthropologists start looking at war, being comparativists they're looking at conflict across cultures. And they want to see how conflict starts, how it's promoted, how it's resolved, how it explodes into more serious kinds of conflicts that we can call war--but you can't really decide quite what is different between a fairly serious local conflict and what we call war. I don't think anybody has really defined what is war per se.

Conflict rises in every kind of social interaction, and so it has got to be resolved if you're going to have unity and smooth operating relationships.

Riess: You were saying before we started that your first awareness of this was when you were in Austria.

M. Foster: Where Hitler was marching into all these countries including Austria, and we just happened to be on the scene and saw at first hand. Some of our closest friends were Jewish, and they were suffering from the way they were being treated. And

George and I were in the middle of it, because we were trying to help in any way we could. Or interact, or even keep on with our social relations, which was not easy because we couldn't go to restaurants, we had to eat and meet where we were living or where they were living.

Riess: A small digression, on pacifism and conflict and so on, do you remember how they were talked about in your family? Do you think that you absorbed a lot of that?

M. Foster: I suppose I did. I can't really isolate pacifism as a topic that came up in the dinner table. There was an awful lot of conversation about Russia, about communism and about Russia. My uncles traveled with Wendell Willkie--my uncle Mike came back from Russia with all sorts of posters about communism. People tended to--people didn't just accept the fact that communism was evil, but began to look at what kind of benefits there might be in communism.

Riess: So different points of view were entertained.

M. Foster: Yes. Very, very much. Certainly when I was in college, one of my best friends, a fellow anthropology student was definitely a Communist. Now whether he was card-carrying, I cannot say, but he certainly called himself a Communist. And he took me to hear a lot of left-wing speakers in Chicago. Emma Goldman was one.

Riess: So to return to this discussion of conflict and anti-conflict, or peace and war--and you were saying it's hard to define it.

M. Foster: It's been a problem all along for anthropologists. When Robert Rubinstein and I started getting anthropologists interested--I am ahead of the story. I'll go back to PACT, because that's when it started.

More on the International Peace Academy and PACT

Riess: You told about being introduced to Ruth Young last time. I wondered if you had been talking with your women friends about these subjects before. Or was this a kind of spontaneous event?

M. Foster: I certainly must have been talking about it to Julie--my close friend, Julie Jurs. She and I were among the ones that went to talk to Ruth Young and got interested in the International

Peace Academy. And since Ruth Young spent part of her year in Berkeley, we had a great deal of contact with Ruth. Ruth's maiden name was Forbes. She was one of the very wealthy Forbes family. It was she who started the Peace Academy, and she who obviously funded it in the beginning, although she was trying to get other people involved in funding too.

Riess: Why don't you tell me more about the Peace Academy.

M. Foster: The Peace Academy basically was trying to promote a non-hostile dialogue on an international level. Not just within the United States, but internationally. And it was trying to provide diplomats with a neutral place to talk about these things. You see, the United Nations was in New York, and the Peace Academy has offices very close to the United Nations, and there always has been a great deal of interaction between the two. But the diplomats at the United Nations have to speak cautiously in terms of their own countries and their own countries' interrelationships, where the Peace Academy gave them an opportunity to organize a neutral sort of atmosphere where they weren't going to think as diplomats all the time.³

Riess: Off the record.

M. Foster: Completely off the record.

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M. Foster: Now wait a minute until I get my thoughts organized again. PACT--which was 'Peace, a Community Task,' and that was because we were trying to get people in our community--PACT was a grass roots effort to get people thinking about these issues. Ordinary people were not really very concerned about the nuclear threat, and we felt that it was an important thing to be concerned about!

Riess: There were the various Quaker groups.

³For further information on the International Peace Academy see their website at www.ipacademy.org. In her editing of the oral history, Foster notes that she was invited to join the board of the IPA but declined in favor of promoting peace and conflict orientation with anthropologists. Foster referred to the Commission on Peace and Human Rights [CPHR], and to the fact that Robert A. Rubinstein is editing a journal for them, *Social Justice: Anthropology, Peace and Human Rights*, which is the extension of what started as the Commission's Newsletter and then Newsjournal.

M. Foster: There were a lot of groups, but they weren't in Berkeley. There were many, many groups that began about that time doing the same kind of thing we were; either organizing on a local level or organizing within the churches.

Riess: What was Ruth Young's role in PACT?

M. Foster: She was inspirational. We talked to her a great deal.

I began, at that time, finding out what all these organizations were and what they doing. And I found out about them by contributing to them in small amounts so that I would get their literature. And I've continued getting literature, because I go on contributing to a great many organizations. I get their literature, which has been very useful to me because I know what a lot of different organizations are doing.

Riess: Grass roots basically?

M. Foster: No, but most of them were national, not international--now they're beginning to be, particularly because Ploughshares became international. I started contributing to these various things--including the Peace Academy. Including Ploughshares, which I've forgotten how I found out about, but one way or another through the grapevine you find out about things. Ploughshares has been one of the most creative and productive peace-oriented NGOs [non-governmental organizations].⁴

There were quite a few that I've contributed to; some of them I subsequently dropped, and some of them I've kept on. Union of Concerned Scientists is one. But the two that I really picked out as the ones that I thought were the most useful, most valuable to me in my thinking were first the Peace Academy and second Ploughshares. And Ploughshares takes in money in order to fund projects that it researches in order to determine the most useful to its goals.

Riess: I'm very interested in what PACT--what was its impact?
[laughs]

M. Foster: I think it had a moderate impact on a local level. We did have speakers, some of them from Peace Academy. We put on benefits. We had a global fashion show at the Blake Gardens here in Berkeley and that was quite marvelous. We got local restaurants to donate food. We had tables with food. It was kind of promotional for the restaurants too that contributed.

⁴See Appendices regarding Mary Foster and Ploughshares.

The oriental restaurants were the ones that contributed most readily to it. Spenger's was kind of crossed out because they were not very forthcoming.

Riess: After an event like that did you gain members?

M. Foster: We didn't exactly have a membership. It was just sort of a steering committee and people that we had on our lists as participants, I guess--it wasn't a formal organization in any sense of the word.

Riess: Then it's hard to measure the impact, isn't it?

M. Foster: Very hard, but it's hard to measure the impact of Ploughshares, or the impact of the Peace Academy. You can't measure those things. All of these things sort of fan out--all of these various organizations. So that peace, which was something you couldn't even talk about in those days--so peace became viable.

Riess: Did it continue to be mostly women? And was one of the impacts that women would talk about it with their husbands?

M. Foster: Could have been. I think that Physicians for Social Responsibility, for example, had a lot of women and the president was a woman. However, I think in a way women have always been more liberal than men. Do you agree?

Riess: I think that where peace is concerned they've been willing to lay down their lives for it.

M. Foster: I was trying to think--you know, the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory was a target for quite a long time because it was doing nuclear weapons research, and I went up and held hands around the Livermore Laboratory at one point. I'm sure there were many more women than men. It might have been partly that the men were at work, and the women weren't, because not so many women had jobs in those days, but I don't know, I've never really thought about sex division in this connection.

Riess: Did it ever become confrontational? Your group?

M. Foster: No. No. We had these talks and meetings and people came, I think people that probably already were convinced in a certain sense, but needed more material to work with.

Riess: How long did PACT keep going? A couple of years?

M. Foster: More than a couple of years, but I can't really tell you. People sort of drifted off into doing other things that were

interconnected, just as I decided I could play the most useful role within anthropology.

If we get back to the Peace Academy, their original focus was really on peacekeeping, trying to preserve peace where they could. Then it expanded so that it began examining the root causes of war, and I think it's the root causes of war that always interested me the most. That's really why I wanted to draw anthropologists into it, because anthropologists have a way of looking at things that is oriented along those lines-- and I can get into that when I get into what I was doing later with anthropology. But the International Peace Academy has had research programs all along, and made masses of case studies of conflict.

Riess: Employing what kind of people to do this? Anthropologists?

M. Foster: No. Well, to a certain extent Robert Rubinstein, and I'll get to him--yes, they had to some extent drawn anthropology into it, but I guess mostly because of me and Robert.

They've had programs all over the world, Africa, Haiti, any place that there were conflicts or incipient conflicts they've studied down the years, and it's still very much a going concern. They have training programs on conflict resolution.

Riess: Would they send representatives into a conflict?

M. Foster: Into the conflict they wouldn't, but they would talk to the people involved and would have some seminars and things that dealt with it on the sidelines or studied it.

Riess: Has it always been privately funded?

M. Foster: Yes. Oh they may get grants from time to time, I don't know. I haven't followed that part, but I'm always interested in any kind of training programs from organizations that have developed a certain kind of know how about how to deal with it. Just to bring young people in and train them, I think is invaluable. And that's one thing that Ploughshares has been focusing on quite a lot. We fund lots of training situations where young people can be started early thinking about these issues. I think that's very important.

Riess: With the Peace Academy were you on a board of directors?

M. Foster: No. I could have gone on the board of directors, but I refused.

I was on this AAAS Committee on Science, Arms Control, and National Security, which I talked about last time. When I was trying to think of individual influences--you asked me about women. The woman who was the most influential was sociologist Elise Boulding, Kenneth Boulding's wife--they were both very much involved. I didn't think that she and I ever were as influential as we had hoped to be, but she was the other social scientist on the committee at that time.

PACT began holding meetings of people who were interested in strategy, interested in how these conflict situations could be better dealt with, and those were the kind of speakers that we would get to talk. General Rikhye was the President of the Peace Academy for quite a long time, the first president--Major General Indar J. Rikhye, from India. He was a very, very good president. Then he retired from it and they brought in Olara Otunnu, an African. I have notes on all these things somewhere.

Integrating Anthropology and Peace and War: Robert Rubinstein and the 1983 IUAES Commission

M. Foster: What I really want to do is talk about anthropology, and peace and war. The reason that I took the direction that I took was really because of anthropology. Anthropologists had not been particularly involved--or certainly had not been involved with war. They might have been involved with global kinds of conflicts from their research, but the research that most anthropologists did was in kind of remote little bounded communities, and did not have much to do with the world at large. So war had not loomed very large for community investigators.

However, Margaret Mead, as you might expect, had gotten herself involved, and her husband Gregory Bateson, after the Second World War. In the years from about 1962 to 1965, Margaret Mead had been trying--proposing that anthropologists get involved. She felt it was important for anthropologists. But there hadn't been very much going on and it didn't really result in much--it was a very minor note in anthropology during that time.

Riess: Was part of the ethical code not being involved?

M. Foster: In a way. Yes. Applied anthropology was not considered a real field of anthropology in those days. Now it's probably the

biggest one. If you look at the annual meetings, the papers, the seminars, symposia, an awful lot of medical anthropology. And of course that was George who worked on getting that started.

Riess: But you were having some stirrings.

M. Foster: I was trying to have my own stirrings with anthropology, because I thought that anthropology had a great deal to contribute that was not being utilized.

Conflict--every society deals with conflict in some way. And since societies differ very markedly in their cultural values, how they handle conflict is a very interesting topic in itself, and it hadn't been really thought of very seriously as a major kind of a contribution to anthropology.

Now I'd better say how I met Robert, and how Robert and I got involved in this. The International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences [IUAES]--a big mouthful, but it is truly international--has a meeting every five years where people come from all over the world. They hold symposia, and anthropologists give papers on various topics. And in 1983--I always have to work the dates back from the annual meetings.

Riess: In your vita it says that since 1983 you have been on the board of the Commission on the Study of Peace of the IUAES.⁵

M. Foster: Well, Robert and I were the major catalysts in founding this.

If that was 1983, I must have met Robert in 1981. George and I had gotten involved with the mechanisms of running the International Union, and we went to an intercongress in between the five year intervals [Intercongress of the IUAES, Amsterdam, April 22-25, 1981, *The Future of Structuralism*]. Because we were going to go anyway to this meeting, I decided I would give a paper. So it was this symposium on structuralism--Robert was also going to participate and I was impressed by Robert. (Actually, I first heard Robert speak at an annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, which was held in Mexico City [1974], which was unusual. Robert had given a paper there, so although I had not really met him, I'd heard him.)

⁵ Mary Foster and Roger Fisher organized a symposium at the 1983 International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences in Vancouver. The title was *Peace and War: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*.

But I was interested [in Robert]. We were both interested in structuralism, from different points of view, actually, so we got acquainted, and we got to be very chummy with each other and sat around talking a great deal, and we kept talking about the problems of peace and conflict. We agreed that anthropology should have more of an impact than it did.

Robert always accuses me of saying that we should organize a meeting for the upcoming IUAES meeting--anyway, we decided we would do that. So then we had to work on getting people to participate--not many anthropologists were working on this subject, and had to make it international--we couldn't draw just from the United States. We managed to find enough people to put on a great many symposia--in fact, the thing sort of grew because people who had been working in various parts of the world had data on conflict that they hadn't really thought about.

Riess: How did you find them?

M. Foster: Oh, we looked at the people's writings, people we knew, some of them, and we'd figure that they would have things to say, so that we put together quite a sizable group of people. We had quite a lot of trouble--the symposium was held in Vancouver, and we had to fund the overseas people. We struggled with that, and we finally did get funding from Ford Foundation, but it was a real hassle.

The first thing that was difficult was deciding who would be a possible participant. We spent a lot of time working on that.

Riess: Where was Rubinstein? Where was he based?

M. Foster: Robert was at the University of Chicago. He was one of these young anthropologists who--his first marriage--. He did his field work for his dissertation in Belize, and his wife wanted to go back to school, and he didn't have a job. So he got a job in administration with the University of Chicago. He was there for quite a while, and he had temporary jobs at Northwestern, and so on. But he really didn't have a permanent job for quite a while, and I worried quite a lot--you know, if you get out of the loop it's very hard to get back into it, and he was very definitely first rate. He kept publishing though, he was published more than just about anybody I know. [laughs]

Riess: He wasn't here when you were organizing the symposium.

M. Foster: No, but we spend a lot of time interacting back and forth. And when we finally had the symposia, there were--gosh, I didn't write down how many papers there were, but it was quite big, because we had a minicongress, and there were minisymposia before the congress started, with our participants, which was very informal. That got us all integrated together into the subject matter, which was lots of fun. And we met at a beautiful hotspring place, on a lake [Harrison Hot Springs].

Riess: Was it well attended?

M. Foster: Oh, yes. All the participants came--all the people who were giving papers. You mean our symposia?

Riess: You were just giving papers to each other, it was not to the larger group?

M. Foster: No, this Hot Springs session was just the preliminaries--the pre-congress. The IUAES is always extremely well attended, and we did have very good attendance at all of our Vancouver papers.

By that time we were all excited about it. The people who had given papers, because that was their first attempt at something like this, and they got very enthusiastic and so on, we decided to form a commission. The IUAES has a series of commissions on various aspects of anthropology, things like urban anthropology.

Riess: Commission implies an action group?

M. Foster: Yes. It implies a chairman and people who are interested being brought together to work on the topic. And it gives it an international presence that sort of formalizes it.

We decided that we would propose to the International Union that we would set up a commission on the study of peace [COSP]. And it's the only commission that was instantly accepted. The minute it was proposed it was accepted. Usually they have to go through waiting periods, so this was very interesting in itself.

Riess: Was there discussion about what to name it? Whether to name it the study of peace, the study of war, the study of conflict? As a group did you all talk about that wording?

M. Foster: Yes. And we had all felt that it was important to emphasize peace, not war. So we were unanimous on wanting to call it the Commission on the Study of Peace.

Ever since, we have had a chairmanship of one American, one European, and one non-European--there's always been this three way chairmanship. It still goes on and has meetings and symposia, and the people that are involved sometimes put on meetings in their own countries. A group of us went to Moscow for one of the meetings of the commission--and with meetings you give papers too [working meeting of the Commission on the Study of Peace of the IUAES, Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Moscow, Aug. 19-25, 1985]. We had one [in 1986] in Kanpur, India. Those are the two I've gone to.

Riess: The kindred spirit aspect must have been terrific.

M. Foster: Oh, Robert and I have been absolutely best friends ever since! We worked so much together, we edited these books together that came out of the symposia.⁶

⁶See Appendices for Rubinstein's tribute to Foster on March 5, 2001.



Mickie Foster with Lola Picho,
1991. The Fosters live with Lola
when they visit Tzintzuntzan,
Mexico



Jeremy, Mickie, George, and Melissa, vacationing in 1997.

IX BOOKS, FRIENDS, FAMILIES

[Interview 9: May 2, 2000] ##

Reading, Gardens, Art

Riess: Reading comes up as a theme in your life. Can we talk more about the influence of that?

M. Foster: When we got up to be, oh, eleven or twelve years old, Bunny and I began reading adult books. Our mother was our guide. My parents had bookshelves full of things, so we would ask our mother what should we read next?

Novels were what we liked, and she steered us into all kinds of things, and by the time I got to France, I was reading French novels. I was reading in French more than in English, because that's where I was.

When we went to Austria, and we were just there for a few months, that apartment house that we lived in--well, the room that we occupied--had bookshelves with French books, so I used to knit and sit and read French novels when I was in Austria. [laughs] My knitting wasn't ever terribly complicated--I was making sort of simple sweaters and things like that--but I would sit and read these French novels, which I just loved. I went through a lot of French literature when I was in Austria.

Riess: Why did you particularly love the French novels?

M. Foster: Because that's what was on the bookshelf. And I hadn't had as much experience with German. German is harder to read than French. The organization of German language, is more complicated than French. If you've had Latin, you know, you have kind of a background for French, but the only background for German is English. And English and German are different enough so roots and words often are the same, but the

construction of verbs and things like that is very different. I never have gotten so I really enjoyed reading German novels.

Riess: The influence of literature on you--it sounds like there was a lot of it, but what was the influence?

M. Foster: [laughs] I think that English novels probably were the greatest influence--this is probably an anthropological slant on the question--because I was learning about English life. And when my son married an English girl, I was able to come up with all sorts of things about life in England that most people don't know, and it was from reading English novels. I suppose what I was doing was kind of anthropological.

I read things that my teachers tended to think were over my head, but they weren't over my head. You know, if you read Stendahl and Flaubert if you're a teenager, people think that you aren't going to understand this. I was always irritated, because I did understand it, at least I thought I understood it, and I still think I did. I think young people often are a lot cleverer than their elders and betters think they are. [tape interruption]

Riess: You're saying what you care about in a novel is--

M. Foster: --is character. Periodicity is interesting, but it doesn't grip me the way character does. I can absorb the period if it affects the character, but otherwise I don't think that I think very much about it. [telephone ringing]

Riess: Let's see what's next on your list.

M. Foster: What I was trying to say was that I think there are several major influences that came out of my childhood. One is reading and literature. One is travel because we started traveling early and we kept on traveling all through my childhood. The third one is the out-of-doors, because we did a lot of camping. I loved the out-of-doors--it didn't make me into a great gardener like you. [laughs]

Riess: Only by reputation--you have not seen my garden! [laughs]

M. Foster: When we built this house, I thought, now here's an opportunity to build my own garden, because I was always living in houses with established gardens, and I didn't understand them. I thought, I'll start from scratch and then I'll know everything about it, so that's what I did, and some things succeeded and some things didn't. But I didn't really sustain this interest enough. My father was a terrific gardener, so was George's

mother, so George and I both felt that it was the job of the other partner to pay attention to the garden, until we built this house and I did take over.

Riess: When you built this house, it was a bare plot.

M. Foster: It was a hill top--a cliff. And so we don't have very much garden space. We have a flat plot in front and a flat plot down at the bottom, not much--a few flat places. So I try to work around that.

Riess: When you built this house, you weren't thinking of it as a house where children would be playing in the garden.

M. Foster: No. Our children were grown by that time so that didn't enter in. Berkeley's a difficult place, too, for children playing. We moved from Washington, where we had loads of play space for our children, and they were free to be anywhere they wanted to be outside.

I've discussed that with them since, because nowadays people are scared to death to let their children be out of sight. I don't remember paying any attention to where they went around the neighborhood, what they were doing, which was kind of nice. When we lived in Mexico City for two years they had to be kept within the confines of the yard with a high fence all the way around, as houses are in Mexico City. You couldn't let your children wander.

I wanted in the worst way to get my children back to Washington, to the States--we did go back to Washington--so that they could be free. I felt it was so confining to have to be under somebody's charge all the time. Nowadays that's the way every child grows up. I think it's so sad.

Melissa's been here for a week, and I was talking about this with her, the scare about predators and evil men, rapists, and she was telling me some of the adventures she'd had around Washington in her childhood that I had not known about, but nothing threatening. An older boy who tried to make some advances or gestures toward her, but nothing really that she couldn't handle.

Riess: Okay. So the out-of-doors was always a wonderful, positive influence in your life.

M. Foster: And my children's life. [tape interruption]

Riess: You say that you actually--you're an artist.

M. Foster: I think in a certain sense, I have an artistic mind. I have a good sense of design, a good sense of color, I care about design and color.

My friend Joey and I took a class in charcoal when we were about eleven or twelve years old. To get down to the Cummings Art School where we took this course, my father had to drive us, on a Saturday, and I think I felt that it was a burden on him. It took him away from his garden and his photography and all the hobbies and projects that he had. I think I felt as if this would just add to his burden. I don't know that we complained. I wanted in the worst way to take painting, but I never asked for anything, I don't know what was the matter with me, but I didn't.

Riess: When you travel do you sketch?

M. Foster: Not much--I was just kind of thinking about that this morning, but I don't really spend very much time sketching, you know. Off and on I did a little bit, I guess. In Washington I did take painting lessons with George's sister who had moved to Washington with her husband, and my closest friend who had been one of my sister's closest friends at Stanford. The three of us took painting lessons from an artist that the ex-Stanford friend knew socially. So we had quite a good time. That was the only time really that I've had any--

Riess: Formal training?

M. Foster: I was going to say that--but I did take a course down at the College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland. My father and I took a painting class together down there.

Riess: Did your art develop into the abstract?

M. Foster: Pretty much. That's the kind of art I really like, I never really liked pictorial art particularly well.

I'm awfully interested in my number three granddaughter who's in graduate school at Yale in art history. She and I spend a lot of time discussing art, and the 18th century is her period. Well, 18th century was the last period I would have chosen, so I'm so interested if I go around to museums with her to hear her discuss the paintings. It has given me a completely new appreciation of 18th-century art. She recently sent me a book about 18th-century art and it gives me more understanding of why she's interested.

I tell her that she's really an anthropologist. That makes her mad. "It's not anthropology, it's art!" But it's really sort of social history, and she picks up themes--she's very innovative in the papers that she writes, she's really quite extraordinary. She hadn't been interested in nature and now I've got her looking at trees, and she says, "Oh, Grandma, you'd be so pleased, I'm now noticing trees!" [laughs]

She did get tired of my telling her she was an anthropologist because she was interested in social aspects of art.

Riess: Where are your paintings? Are they dispersed?

M. Foster: My paintings are pretty much dispersed. I stopped painting because I felt as if--there's something about it, I couldn't see what I was doing, you know--as if I couldn't focus on it in the way I wanted to. My eyes didn't work right. It's a psychological state I got into. So I pretty much quit. I found it very frustrating.

Riess: What do you mean?

M. Foster: I can't explain what I mean. I can't even explain it to myself, let alone to you.

Riess: Did you pursue crafts also?

M. Foster: I've always done certain kinds of crafts in a very sloppy way, I never focused on anything. I did silkscreening for a while.

Riess: When you were in Mexico you might have learned pottery-making.

M. Foster: George is the one who learned how pottery was made. George was the expert on Mexican pottery. He still is, I think. He doesn't pay attention to them anymore. People come to him and ask him things. He remembers. He's got this wonderful memory and he knows exactly where everything came from, but he doesn't focus on it anymore the way he did.

We both love pottery. We think, "No, we won't collect any more pottery." But we can't stop ourselves. Any place we go we pick up something.

Riess: Would it have worked when you were down there for you to be taking lessons in pottery? Or would that have been a kind of wrong role thing?

M. Foster: Mexico City wouldn't have been the place, and when I was in the village, I was doing fieldwork, I didn't have time. I don't think I would have anyway. I don't know. My father and my sister and I took a pottery course here in Oakland at one point and we learned how to pull up a pot on the wheel, which is very difficult to do. At least we found it difficult. After we'd each made our quota of pots, none of us carried on with it. We all enjoyed it, but we didn't get passionate about it.

Social Groups, Society of Women Geographers

Riess: I have to ask how it was to have so much family around you all the time? Did you have to arrange to keep some distance?

M. Foster: [laughs] They weren't around me. They had their own lives and their own friends and their own social circles. Okay, you and I both belong to Town and Gown. And my mother belonged to Town and Gown. My mother had a circle of friends in Town and Gown that my friends and I came to refer to as "the little old ladies," which of course my friends and I have more than moved into now, so it's kind of funny. But no, there were different groups in all of these places.

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M. Foster: Bunny and I had a group of friends that called itself The Sewing Club. We got together when our children were little and did our children's mending--hemmed our little girls' dresses and darned socks and things like that. We always called it The Sewing Club. It's just recently ceased. It's been going on down the years.

Riess: I'm sure I drove George a little mad with my excitement about the groups that he belonged to, and I am very interested in your groups too.

M. Foster: George goes for Monday lunch with The Boys. This is a group of friends that really started out with my brother-in-law Gene and his twin brother Pete and their Oakland friends. It has nothing to do with the university. The Boys have been having lunch together for years and years. And a lot of the boys' wives were Sewing Club members. These were couples that we would see socially. The Boys didn't start as early as The Sewing Club. The Sewing Club goes way back to when our children--I think maybe Jeremy was the first baby in The Sewing

Club. Not that I was older than the others, but I just had a baby first.

Riess: The names of these seem ironic--The Boys and The Sewing Club.

M. Foster: Well, that's because they never had any official names. So they just kind of got called that. [laughs]

Riess: Did The Sewing Club, or did any of your groups constitute what we would think of now as a support group during troubled times?

M. Foster: Well, we would certainly call on each other. My best friend always was Julie, with whom I went to college and who married my brother-in-law's twin brother Pete. And they lived first in Oakland and then in Berkeley. Pete and Julie were our support group, I suppose all their lives, because they were the friends we would call on first. If we didn't call on Bunny and Gene, we'd certainly call on Pete and Julie. They were the closest to us. But I had other very close friends that were university people. It was sort of as if we had these two things going, the university people who were largely anthropologists, but not all, and the local people who were in The Sewing Club, and The Boys.

Riess: How did Town and Gown fit into that?

M. Foster: I didn't even want to join Town and Gown. My mother belonged to Town and Gown. My mother when she moved to new places always wanted to join things, she wanted to understand the social network. So she loved Town and Gown, as well she might.

There are wonderful people in Town and Gown, and it's a very interesting thing because the speakers are always good. I like the way it's organized; I like things like that where you don't feel obligated to do good works. You know, I'm happy to do good works, but I just like to have social things where you don't have to be thinking about how worthwhile and valuable you are all the time.

Town and Gown is organized so that people form committees and then suggest names for speakers. That gets hashed out in your committee, and you go before the board and the board decides. You have three or four names of people, and usually the board decides on the one that the committee has decided they like the best. And if there's a choice, they make good choices. So you have good speakers--people you want to hear.

This is a wonderful area for speakers--the whole Bay Area you can choose from and there are so many people doing

interesting things. Just the university alone, but when you get the university plus everybody in San Francisco--the whole area.

Riess: And you belong to the Society of Woman Geographers.

M. Foster: I started that one year [1951] because I was kind of forced to by the Washington group. After I got settled here permanently, they said, "You said that you would organize a Bay Area group if you were permanent." So Alice Tisdale Hobart, the novelist, a close friend of my mother's who had been a member in Washington too, she and I struggled to find women that were really qualified. They had to be women who had had some sort of lifework that had some geographical tie. Anthropology is a good one for it, and nowadays we do have some geographers. For quite a while we didn't.¹

We had a lot of botanists because Anita Pearson was one of our early people that I brought in. I brought her in through Betty Leopold. Betty and Starker Leopold were close friends of ours when we lived for two years in Mexico City, and they came to Cal and then later we came to Cal, so we went on being very close friends.

Riess: Do you remember any other early members of that group?

M. Foster: Well, the people that had been members before or had moved out here were members. There was one--she was an arctic explorer who lived in Marin County. And Lucy Sprague Mitchell, the founder of the Bank Street School in New York, who wrote a lot of books about childhood education. She was in a retirement place in Palo Alto, so she was not in very good shape, but she did come occasionally.

Riess: Did you belong to the Section Club?

M. Foster: Yes, and Kay Kerr asked me to join the student hospitality committee. That was when I was early in my days here, and I did do that, found people who would entertain foreign students, take on foreign students. Otherwise, I'd go to Section Club meetings sometimes, but I've never been really active.

¹For further on the Society of Women Geographers see their website at www.iswg.org. As Foster describes it, it was founded by women interested in exploration who felt there should be a medium for intellectual exchange among traveled women engaged in geographical work and its allied fields, ethnology, archaeology, astronomy, biology, natural history, sociology, folklore, arts and crafts, etc., any other field with a geographical focus.

Riess: And the anthropology department in the beginning in George's time here. Was it a social group?

M. Foster: It was small enough so that we were all very close friends of each other and we had lots of parties. We all got together. Then it got so big that it was too hard to entertain. People pretty much stopped entertaining each other, which is too bad. You know it was quite marvelous in the olden days.

We also had a group of Bay Area anthropologists that took in Stanford and UCSF and Cal. I can't remember how often we met, I think it was once a month. Things like that--good things come to an end unfortunately. At that time, during those years, we saw a lot of the Bay Area anthropologists. We used to go back and forth to Stanford quite a lot, which we don't anymore--because of the traffic.

Family Vacations in Calaveras County

Riess: [tape interruption] George once said that the two of you considered buying a winery at one point.

M. Foster: [laughs] That was because we wanted to come back to California, and we were trying to think of ways to come back to California.

George got kind of discouraged. He was at the Smithsonian and he was out of academe and he really wanted to get back in an academic job, but he had no obvious prospects. He did have a lead at one point from the University of Michigan, and one from Harvard. That was about the time that we did decide to come back here, and we gambled on coming back here.

We just loved Berkeley, we wanted to live in Berkeley, and we kept trying to think how we could live in California, and what we could do. So it was a joke--but it was kind of a somewhat serious joke that we could buy a little winery--we even had our eye on one called Mayacamas. We didn't really ever consider buying a winery, but we did toy with the idea. When we came here, all George had was a visiting professorship, but when it became apparent that he might be able to become permanent, we didn't think about that winery idea very long.

Riess: Later your family ended up actually buying a piece of California.

M. Foster: Yes, my sister's parents-in-law, the Albert Jurs, looked for years for the perfect place in the country to retire to. And after several years of searching they found the perfect place, which was in Calaveras County on a branch of the Mokelumne River near Jackson, outside of a little town called West Point.

My parents--my father retired from Washington and they came to live in Berkeley--had been there to visit the Jurs and Pete and Gene's father Albert said, "Why don't you acquire a place up here too? I'll sell you some of my land." He had bought quite an acreage.

My dad said, "Well, I would only want to own it if I could have the lake." It was a little lake that was a depression in the ground that got filled--actually there were two little lakes, one above the other. Albert didn't care about swimming, Albert cared about trout fishing, and where we were on that branch of the Mokelumne River that's good trout fishing. My dad liked to trout fish too, but he loved swimming, so he said he would only consider it if he could buy the lake. Albert said, "Okay. You can have the lake."

My parents were getting ready to build a summer place on the lake, a small house so they could go up and be there in the summer. There were only two houses on this road, a dead end off a county road. The Jurs' place was an old farmhouse that they had bought and remodelled. Farther up the road, a little over a mile farther, was this other place that suddenly came on the market. It wasn't so much a house, it was kind of like a hunting lodge, a stag party place really, a big lodge-type building and some outbuildings. This man had kept horses, dogs, and chickens so he had buildings for them, and quite a good stable.

My parents decided to buy that house and remodel it. The house was fairly substantial, and they remodelled the house, and they remodelled the stable into guest rooms, and remodelled the chicken house into a guest room and bath. And my father built a darkroom, and they spent summers up there and that's how we got started with that. But it's such a long story about Snag, about sharing houses, changing houses with people--it takes me a half an hour at least to tell, even in the simplest possible way, which I have to do when I take guests up there.

##

M. Foster: Ultimately we sold the upper ranch to close friends, and Pete and Julie and George and I built a little pre-fabricated house close to the lake, sort of half-way between the two original

ranches that was close to the lake, and we shared that with Pete and Julie until Julie got Alzheimer's--Julie died finally after ten or twelve years of Alzheimer's, a very sad time, and ultimately Pete died too.

George and I at some point bought out Pete, so our little house is just ours, and it's a wonderful little house. It's pre-fabricated, it came in module-size walls and things, but we had a lot of possibility for laying it out the way we wanted to--moving things around. We've loved the house. It's been just a great place. We're on the river, we're on the lake, we're in the middle of the woods. We can take walks. We can sit on the banks of the river and contemplate. We can do lots of things.

We had traditions, our annual frog jump. George and I went with Edward and Delila Gifford to the Angels Camp fair one time and saw how they did the frog jump at Angels Camp. We modeled ours on that. Melissa painted frogs on a canvas and made a target with measured circles for the length of the jumps. The frogs would be started in the center and jump toward the edge--the frogs instinctively knew where the water was.

The men and children went out to catch frogs the night before--wives usually didn't go to catch frogs, but the kids loved to. George was the champion frog catcher. Jeremy was also extremely good at the frog catching. We'd keep the frogs overnight in the sandbox, which had a lid, we'd keep them damp.

The youngest kid had the first choice--reached into the bag and pulled out a frog. Then in turn up to the oldest, we each took a frog, and each one named his or her frog. A frog measurer measured the frogs. A jump measurer measured the jumps. Each frog was placed in the bullseye in the center with his legs under him so he was ready to jump, and he was given three jumps, because frogs have to get a start. Then the jump measurer would put his foot in the place that the frog had wound up--because the frog would keep going and go jump in the lake!

We had trophies. We had little loving cups that we had engraved for first prize. And we had blue ribbons for second prize with little pottery frogs glued onto them. We had third prize and we had booby prizes. Our family never won a loving cup!

Building the San Luis Road House

Riess: It sounds idyllic, and full of good memories.

Today also you were going to talk about how you and George work together on projects.

M. Foster: I was going to talk about our problems in cooperation with each other, because when we built this house, George said we can't build a house because we can't cooperate, we'll just fight all the time.

George would ask me to do things with him--for one thing, when he was a graduate student at Cal he did fieldwork up in Round Valley, and he learned how to make cat's cradles out of string. They had a lot of cat's cradles that had meaning, and George knew how to predict the sex of people's children and so on, and he could do it with these cat's cradles, so he wanted to publish an article on Yuki Indian cat's cradles.

Since I was the person who did know how to draw to a certain extent, he recruited me to draw pictures of his cat's cradles. And he got so mad at me! [laughs] He would probably say I got mad at him, but we just had so much turmoil over trying to do this simple little article about drawing cat's cradle strings. It isn't terribly easy to draw any kind of strings that go over and under each other, and so I was struggling along and George was always mad at me, and we were having a terrible time.

That gave him the idea that we couldn't get along together, because we had tried some other things--we'd had other cooperative things where we got along fine, except he didn't see them that way. Our fieldwork in Tzintzuntzan, for example, we always got along just fine with. In fact, of all things we do together, I think that's what we're the most compatible about. We enjoy the village, we enjoy the people. We like to gossip about them.

That's an interesting thing about George. He doesn't like to gossip about anything anyplace else, except in the village. There the gossip is grist for the mill--that's the sort of trivia that anthropology likes to specialize on--but he's really not very interested in people or people's doings or social things otherwise. Whereas I am. So we are not particularly compatible in gossiping about Berkeley. If I'm going to gossip about Berkeley, I have to gossip with my female

friends, because all my female friends like to talk about things in Berkeley, including you! [laughs]

Women are just built that way more than men, I guess. But I always think, how can you be interested in everything social that goes on in one little village in Mexico, and not be the slightest degree interested in the United States. It isn't just Berkeley--it's everything that goes on. Elián González, let's say--since that's the most recent thing everybody's been thinking of--I find all of those things theoretically interesting, but George doesn't find any theoretical strings connecting them.

It's a different world that it doesn't occur to him to look at in the same way. Whereas just the way I did with my students during the Kent Cambodia crisis, I could have gone out and interviewed people about Elián González and gotten all sorts of interesting stuff. Reporters do that now. Reporters sometimes act a lot like anthropologists nowadays--you see it in an awful lot that comes out. You wish they acted a little more like anthropologists! But there's a certain amount of that going on.

Riess: So here we have arrived at "how to cooperate on building a house."

M. Foster: Well, we always liked the same kind of houses. We liked the same kind of furniture. We liked the same kind of appurtenances--whatever kind. Our tastes ran pretty much along the same lines so we didn't have any problem about what kind of house we would like. But George worried.

For our architect we got Bob Ratcliff, who was a close friend already--stayed a close friend all the way through, until the end of his life, I think one of our very best friends. We just had a ball building our house with Bob. I think I couldn't have built a house with Frank Lloyd Wright, let's say, because he wanted to interview the people that he was building for, and then he wanted hands off, he didn't want them to cooperate with him.

George and I were both getting so many ideas, and George was wonderful because he was working with the architect [Gardner Dailey] for the new anthropology building at exactly the same time that we were building this house, so he was having all sorts of architectural interaction with two different architects.

Riess: Did you consider Gardner Dailey for this house?

M. Foster: No. We only considered Bob. We knew houses that Bob had built, our style houses. Fortunately the architect that we loved was our good friend and the easiest person in the world to work with. I can't imagine anybody nicer to work with than Bob Ratcliff. I think everybody in Berkeley thought that about Bob. Bob was Mr. Berkeley, sort of. He was mixed up in everything that went on in Berkeley--not architecture so much as civic things. Bob was--you never got mad at Bob. Bob never got mad at you.

Riess: Did you find the property first?

M. Foster: Oh, the finding of property was kind of terrible. We bought a house while we were still only here temporarily, and we liked our house, except it wasn't a good house in many ways. We thought about remodelling the house. George had to have a study with a view, because when we first lived in Berkeley he had a view of Mt. Tamalpais from his study window. He said he couldn't think unless he could see Mt. Tamalpais, so we either had to buy a house with a view of Mt. Tamalpais, or we had to find a lot with a view of Mt. Tamalpais.

We looked at a bunch of lots including this one, and I thought, gee, this is really a good lot. George didn't like it, it was too steep or too something or other, so we didn't buy it, we went on looking. Finally George said, "You know, I think maybe we should have bought that lot." In the meantime the lot had been sold for a goodly price to a real estate developer. But we bit the bullet and bought the lot. [laughs]

One nice thing about the lot was it was not a bare lot. It had bay trees and it was in the middle of a built up part of Berkeley, so it was wooded. We managed to save the bay trees, and I tried awfully hard to save an oak tree, but it would have been right here where the kitchen and dining area are, and Bob couldn't figure out any way to get around it. So we had to cut down that, and our neighbors were very angry with us because they loved the oak tree, and so did I.

But building the house, we each took different segments of the house to decide what would be the best thing to do. I wanted badly to be able to eat out-of-doors, so George worked out that we could have a deck on the view side and a deck on the other [San Luis Road] side. Because that's not ground underneath, it's a deck that has had concrete poured over it so that it looks like a patio. George carefully worked that rearrangement out.

I designed the fireplace. Bob took my design and worked it up. That was a wonderful thing about Bob: he'd take your ideas and he could see the potential and he could work around them so that the details were right.

We moved in in February, on one of those gusty days when it rains and then the sun comes out for a few minutes. They were moving our furniture between gusts of rain, and the trees were whipping around. I'd never lived in a house with windows like this. It was the most exciting day of my life. We've just adored the house. The only thing we did later was enlarge this eating area. We didn't make it quite wide enough, and probably if it had been up to me, I would have thought that was too much to do, but George said, "No. We're going to do that." So we pushed it out about two feet, I think.

Riess: So there was no conflict.

M. Foster: Well, George and I had conflicts about other things, but the thing I remembered most was over the cat's cradle. [laughs] After you go, I'll think of all the things that we have had conflict with.

Melissa and Jeremy

M. Foster: Well, now we talk about my children. I'm going to keep bursting into tears here too because they're so wonderful. But it's so heartening to reach your old age and have your children doing things that you think are so great and leading lives that are so interesting to you. And having your grandchildren also leading lives that you think are so interesting.

I can zero in on the life of each of my granddaughters in a different way and get on what I consider the same wavelength, and I think they can too. They really do like to talk to me, which is most gratifying. Young people are often very bored by elderly people--I always was. Except for my grandmother I thought most old people were just pretty boring.

Riess: With grandchildren there's some kind of conclusion that you can reach about your children and about yourself maybe.

M. Foster: That's true. Yes. You do sort of think, well, this thing really went off pretty well--because my grandchildren wouldn't be so great if my children hadn't been--because you see the

mistakes you make with the children and your children have to suffer through the mistakes you make.

Riess: We could talk about nature and nurture.

M. Foster: I used to have these arguments with my grandfather about nature and nurture, that was one of the Sunday dinner topics in our family dinners. He thought it was all nature, and I thought it was all nurture. Now I've come to more of a middle ground, but I still am pretty much on the side of nurture, I think. Although I do think people come equipped with certain types of minds that you probably can't--I don't know--.

Sense of humor is something I think about quite a lot. To what extent are people born with a sense of humor and to what extent do they acquire a sense of humor. I know a lot of people I think have no sense of humor whatsoever--nice people, even people that I enjoy being with--but the people that are really my good friends always have to have a good sense of humor. I don't insist on it, but that's the way it is: people that I have formed really strong friendships with always have a good sense of humor.

Riess: I think you have said that with Melissa you became involved in her school in Washington, interested in education.

M. Foster: Okay. I got very interested in education and still am. Very interested in education and I think that education has gone completely awry in this country. I think Clinton is completely off base on education.

Riess: Off base?

M. Foster: Yes. The politicians are completely off base. All they want is more strict tests. They want everything to be like European countries where everybody is taught in lockstep, everybody has to go through exactly the same kind of material, and there's very little room for creativity. This is not to say that Europeans don't become creative--very often they do--but there always has been much more creativity in American schooling, more room for creative writing, things like that. But this gets less and less with our recent politicians and Clinton's an example.

Riess: Was the school Melissa was in an experimental school?

M. Foster: It was a progressive school. It was based on the Bank Street School in New York, and it was actually quite psychiatrically oriented. They paid attention to children's personalities and

children's development. And it was very nature-oriented, a lot of hands-on outdoors sort of thing.

An interesting thing about Jeremy's wife Angela is that her education was at a college at Cambridge, an education college that had what came to be known as the British open classroom model which is very similar to Greenacres School in the Washington area where Melissa went.

I would have given anything if Jeremy had gone to Greenacres too, but when we came to Washington, Melissa was nursery school age and Greenacres was only nursery school. Then it started going up through the grades. At that point it hadn't occurred to me to put the children in private schools, but I did believe in nursery schools, I thought children needed interaction with their own age-mates and Greenacres was just--I just loved Greenacres.

Riess: And did you volunteer with it?

M. Foster: No. I was asked to be on the board, I can't remember why, but I was on the board for a little less than the few years, six and a half, that I was in Washington.

Riess: Do you think that it would have made a big difference to Jeremy if he had been in that school?

M. Foster: Yes. It would have made a big, big difference.

Riess: A more accepting environment is it?

M. Foster: Yes. That--I don't know--Jeremy's personality was more apt to clash with teachers than some children's. And he would just not do anything. He was very high-spirited. He could be quite a naughty little boy if he wasn't enjoying what he was doing. But he was so smart--his problem really was that he was too smart for the schools.

I had a terrible time with the public school and with Jeremy. I finally took him out and I put him in a private school. It was a progressive school, sort of like Greenacres but not as good. It went up through the grades--it's still going strong. Then for junior high we transferred him to a very good but more structured school, and that helped. But when we got out here and he was still in junior high, he did just fine if he was enthusiastic about the teacher and the course, but if he didn't, he just would not bother.

Riess: Was that a time of good teaching here?

M. Foster: Berkeley High actually, yes, I think they had quite good teachers. Not necessarily in grade school. He was in junior high. Melissa was still in grade school, and she had kind of a bad experience in the school. She started at Thousand Oaks School down here in Berkeley.

We decided we'd buy a house. We weren't permanent, we were temporary for I've forgotten how many years, but we decided anyway we'd buy a house. She said, "Buy it anyplace except in the Thousand Oaks neighborhood." She wanted to get out of Thousand Oaks. So we got into this neighborhood, which is Cragmont, and that was why. She got along fine in Cragmont.

In fact, Melissa was too good. Melissa was always the top student in every school. She got all the awards. She was the straight A student. When she got to Stanford she said, "I'm not going to go for an honors degree. I'm tired of always doing the things good students are expected to do." She wanted to have more time to take courses in other departments. But Jeremy--I would say they're probably equally smart, but Melissa got off on a better foot. Or maybe her personality was such that it worked better for her.

Riess: When did Melissa start showing signs of interest in linguistics or language?

M. Foster: At Stanford. She took some courses from a linguist named Joseph Greenberg who was--actually he was from Northwestern too, and I knew him slightly when I was finishing at Northwestern. He's a brilliant linguist and she took courses from Joe, but her major was psychology. Then when she got to Harvard she decided that she was going to do her Ph.D. in archaeology.

But when she was just starting her Ph.D. at Harvard--Harvard had two anthropology departments, one in the Peabody Museum and the other in something known as Soc Rel, Social Relations, that was a blanket for disciplines including anthropology and everything except physical anthropology and archaeology. That was when she thought she was interested in language, but she wasn't interested in linguistics proper, she was interested in childrens' language.

Well, she went around to talk to people--she's very enterprising--she went around to talk to Roger Brown who was the founder of the field of psychological anthropology of child language acquisition which is what she did her dissertation on.

Riess: Had Melissa and Jeremy been going to the field with you when they got older? Did they see how the two of you worked?

M. Foster: Not really. They did come to Tzintzuntzan. I don't think children basically are terribly interested in what their parents do--I didn't pay much attention to my mother's or my father's work.

Riess: How about at the dinner table? Would George talk about work?

M. Foster: Really hardly at all.

Riess: And they were brought up in a social milieu in which they were surrounded by fellow academics of yours.

M. Foster: They didn't ever want to participate with adults. They didn't want to come and sit around and listen to adults. [laughs] So I don't think they got as much out of it as they could have.

Riess: So what direction did Jeremy take?

M. Foster: Jeremy didn't work hard enough in high school. Jeremy, without doing much of anything could get by perfectly well, but not quite well enough to, let's say, go to the University of California. So Jeremy decided to go to the University of Colorado, which is an okay school, but kind of a party school. And he didn't get with it academically at all, in fact his grades really slipped.

That was when he went into the army reserve. He was suspended from the University of Colorado, and he knew that sooner or later he had to do something military, so he decided that he would enlist in the reserve. We took him down to Fort Ord, and when the gates slammed behind him I never felt so terrible in my life--it was as if you were putting your kid in prison.

Jeremy's clever, and he learned how to work the system so that he could adjust the system to his own needs. He got through that fine, and when he came out he went back to the University of Colorado--was readmitted and got top grades. He said when he was in the army that most of his fellow reserve people could read a little, but they often had to have comic books explained to them. So he began to see the value in education. [laughs]

He started doing what he should have started doing before. He liked college just fine, and at one point he thought that he would go to graduate school. They were both

good at languages because they learned foreign languages when they were so young; they had a real feel for languages, always had that. So Jeremy thought that maybe he would get into linguistics.

He would have really been a brilliant linguist. He would have been so much better than I am, that I really had hopes that he would do that--and he did take some courses at Columbia. He said the trouble with it was that he really liked being with people, he liked to be out interacting with people. He didn't think he'd make a good academician because it was too confining.

Riess: Why do you say he would have been a better linguist than you?

M. Foster: Because his mind works that way. He has a structural mind. And he's brilliant.

The interesting thing was that Melissa all along had art projects. Melissa's very artistic and she always drew, she always made things. She was extraordinarily original, would use any kind of material in new ways, and she worked with her hands all the time, which Jeremy didn't really do. He was very outdoorsy, very good at sports. But now that's just what he does: artistic work with his hands.

Riess: Is he big and tall like George?

M. Foster: George isn't very tall. People always think George is tall, but George is not tall. He has high shoulders, but he's really not very tall. Melissa and Jeremy are actually about the same height, but she looks taller because she's got more hair--not now--I think they're both pretty much the same height as George. But Jeremy's built differently. Jeremy's stocky.

Riess: And outdoorsy you were saying.

M. Foster: Very good at sports, which George never was particularly, nor was I.

But what Jeremy does now, you see, is so creative and so artistic that it's really quite extraordinary. He's a builder. He just has wonderful ideas and wonderful taste and he's very structural too. When he built his house--the first house they had in Colorado he built and designed--Bob Ratcliff, our architect for this house, looked at the plans and the pictures.

I said maybe Jeremy should go back and study architecture and Bob said, "He doesn't need to study architecture, he's just

naturally talented." Now he's building a house on Orcas Island that, Angela, his wife, says is extraordinarily beautiful, and I'm sure it is. We haven't seen it yet. It's getting pretty well along now, but it has taken him quite a while.

He's kind of a loner like me in the sense that he goes ahead and does his thing in a solitary way, but it's always interesting. But as he was growing up, I never thought he was going to be interested in any kind of craftsmanship. I thought Melissa would. And she still is, but it's a side issue for her. She's also musical--they're both musical, but he didn't stay with the musical thing.

One interesting story about him is that if we were anyplace where there was an orchestra or a band he would go and sit glued to it down in front, as a kid. Then he wanted to take music lessons, and he was pretty young for music lessons, but he urged us. Melissa's school had a musician named Ruth Seeger, who was Pete Seeger's stepmother--she and her husband were both musicians. Actually she was a composer, but she loved working with children. She was marvelous and took on both of our kids as they came along for piano. When she came to Jeremy, what he wanted to do was play the Unfinished Symphony, so she arranged the Unfinished Symphony for Jeremy--so she was just marvelous.

Riess: Do you think he wanted to compose an ending?

M. Foster: No. He just wanted to play it. But you know, for a little kid just starting piano lessons to play the Unfinished Symphony, most teachers would say, "No, you've got to do scales, you've got to this and that," but she let kids be very exploratory.

They both got an interesting sense of music from Ruth. I think that either one of them could have focused on music, or could have focused on language--of course Melissa did--or could have been an anthropologist. George really takes the blame for the fact that Jeremy didn't get into anthropology, because George saw these father-son teams in anthropology where the father was famous and the sons then were just kind of eclipsed by famous fathers. So he didn't want Jeremy--but if he had shown an interest in Jeremy with anthropology, that's the way Jeremy would have gone. It's too bad and George regrets it, but the way that Jeremy's turned out, the things that he's chosen to do have been great, and he's gotten so much satisfaction and is happy with it and everybody loves Jeremy.

Melissa says that Jeremy--Jeremy is quiet, but if he opens his mouth and says something she says silence comes

across the room, everybody listens to Jeremy, and it's true. It's pretty true of George, too. It's true of Melissa, but she doesn't see it as true of herself. It's not true of me. I have to shout louder to make people listen to me.

I know I've talked a lot about the family, but I'm struck all the time about how interested I am in family. I mean just in the whole thing about family, and that people don't pay attention to their families. Everybody is astonished because both George and I are very family oriented.

Riess: The question of "Who am I?" Is that what you think of when you think about being interested in your family?

M. Foster: No. I'm just as interested in George's family. I'm interested in families that I know. My family happens to be the family I know best, and I've been terribly interested in my sister's family, my sister's kids. It doesn't have anything to do with "Who am I?" Except that I'm close to them. You know, they like to talk to me, and I like to talk to them. They're very interesting people.

Riess: You were able to observe your family as they grew older, and many Americans move away from home and so they don't learn anything about growing old particularly.

M. Foster: Yes. We were out here through my parents' old age and through my sister and brother-in-law's old age and death, which is recent.



George & Mickie Foster

Happy Post-Holiday 2000

From
George & Mickie Foster
Jan. 3, 2000

This is the second year when we find ourselves sending a generic "one size fits all" Holiday Greeting. That means some of you will have more news than you really want, while a very few of you may wish for more. Last year's card told of our health problems, our travels, and the account of the wedding of Christy Bowerman (Melissa's oldest daughter) to Rob Burow, in Nijmegen, Holland, as well as the impending birth of our first great-grandchild. Fulfilling all of our expectations, and more. Jasper Burow, a happy little Dutchman, was born on December 23, 1999. He and his parents came to visit us last July at our vacation home, in Calaveras County, where the photograph was taken. The idea occurs to us that Jasper is the first member of our immediate family with a good chance of living in three different centuries. He shows aptitude for it: after all, it took him only nine days to live in the 20th and 21st centuries – something that took his maternal great-grandparents almost 90 years to accomplish! With the advances in medicine anticipated in the new century it seems quite reasonable to expect that he can enjoy a life expectancy of at least 100 years plus nine days.

As for travel, Jeremy and Angela took us to Tzintzuntzan for the first week of July, a heart-warming experience more than 55 years after we began anthropological study there in 1945. But our adventure cruises are a thing of the past, I regret to say. On the positive side, life at 790 San Luis Road is more and more appealing, and we give no thought of going to a retirement home. This Christmas we have had in the house all our descendants and spouses – ten in all – except Christy, Rob and Jasper, who were with Rob's grandparents, in the Netherlands.

And as for health, we are still fighting the good battle. Mickie is on her fourth type of chemotherapy for ovarian cancer and appears to be holding her own. We have come to realize that for people our age cancer is really a chronic illness in which one fights to hold off the inevitable, rather than a disease one hopes to cure. Mickie is spunky and uncomplaining, as you would expect; she continues to cook dinner, make the beds, do the laundry and lead a near normal life. In other words, she appears to be holding her own. My **Progressive Supranuclear Palsy** continues – as its name indicates – to "progress" in a downhill direction. My walking is limited to a slow shuffle a few yards at a time, after lengthy bargaining with my legs, when I try to persuade them that they are not really giving up their autonomy if they agree to take me across the room. Likewise my voice has become very weak and increasingly slurred, as many of you with whom I have talked on the telephone have noticed. Mercifully, I am still able to drive. And I continue to use my CP, although I make more errors than in past years, and my tired fingers linger on the letters with reesultss liiitike thisssss. This explains, in part, at least why we are late in getting off our cards.

So we have much for which to be thankful, and no cause for complaint. We recognize that in the great game of life we have been unusually blessed – particularly by wonderful friends and loving family members, such as you. As we enter the new year our thoughts and best wishes are with you, and may we all exchange greetings twelve months from now!

X TEACHING, SYMPOSIA, AND CURRENT WORK

[Interview 10: May 16, 2000] ##

Teaching at Cal State Hayward, 1970, and Kent Cambodia Crisis¹

M. Foster: After I got my Ph.D. in linguistics, I got a job at California State University, Hayward, in the anthropology department. It was a new department--actually, the university was a college to begin with, and became a university, and there was no separate anthropology department. It was geography and anthropology, which often are paired; if anthropology is not paired with sociology, it tends to be paired with geography.

I had a friend, Barbara Anderson, an anthropologist who had studied at Cal and gotten her Ph.D. at the Sorbonne, who was teaching at Hayward. She felt that they needed a linguist, and she suggested me for the linguistics slot, which I took. I had complete carte blanche to organize any courses that I thought were important, so I taught a course in introductory linguistics, and I taught a course in language and culture. Those were the two standard courses that anthropology majors were required to take.

One advantage that I had at Hayward is that they hired me because I was a linguist, and they had no linguist in the anthropology department, so I had a perfectly clear field. I could do anything I wanted to do, and I could teach any kind of courses, so I started teaching not just linguistics but language and culture and then I started teaching symbolic anthropology, because I started going beyond linguistics as a symbolic system.

The department was not very big. In fact, when I first started it was combined with geography, and there weren't all

¹From Interview #9.

that many students, so that I had relatively small classes and I could have a lot of discussion, and I really think discussion is more interesting than just lecturing. I did prepare lectures, and I did lecture some of the time, but I tried to have as much discussion as I could to get the students involved. I think the only way to get people interested is to have them have some involvement, care about what's happening.

In the course of this, I began getting more and more interested in symbolism in general--not just linguistic symbolism. So I organized another course in symbolic anthropology, with which I had a great deal of fun.

I was teaching at the time of the Kent Cambodia crisis [1970], and George was at that time a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in Behavioral Sciences, so I was commuting--we moved over for the school year to Palo Alto, and I was commuting to Hayward across the bridge. So I was not as active with the fellows of the Center as I would have liked to be because I was too busy. But it was an interesting group. A terrible thing was that one of the professors, a professor from India, lost all of his field notes in a bombing at the Center. Just recently he's written an article about that incident.

The Kent Cambodia crisis disrupted all campuses so badly. Pete and Julie's youngest daughter Stephanie was a freshman at Stanford at the time of the bombing, and was mixed up in all this turmoil, and sympathetic to the student uprising. Students were all sympathetic. So I was teaching a symbolic anthropology course, and I was also teaching language and culture, and in order to keep the students involved, I got them working on projects that had to do with symbolism and graffiti.

There's so much dialogue going on, you know, that from a language standpoint it was terrible interesting, and from a symbolic standpoint equally interesting. And the students really quite threw themselves into it; instead of going off and bombing campuses, they were interested in studying what was going on. I was lucky that I had subject matter that could adapt so well to it.

I was quite pleased with myself actually, because I managed to turn it to good use instead of having everybody drift off away from my class, which happened to a lot of classes. That took up the time that I might have been spending with all these fascinating people at the Center! [laughs] So I didn't get as much out of the Center experience as I wish I had.

- Riess: When you started teaching who did you model yourself on? I think when George first taught he kind of retaught what he had taken from Kroeber, so I wondered whether you were reteaching Mary Haas, or any of your professors?
- M. Foster: I wasn't reteaching anybody, and I never had a course in anthropology of language. Well, at Columbia I had one course that was called "Language," taught by an anthropologist, but it wasn't anything you'd model yourself after.
- Riess: Did you have a textbook that you felt was excellent?
- M. Foster: No. And I really taught it up to too high a level--too intellectual a level. Well, I'd never taught before. I'd always thought that I didn't want to teach, that I'd be scared to death. And I was scared to death, but by the time I began to teach, I had given seminar papers, and I'd had a certain amount of limited public speaking in front of intelligent people, so that I was not as scared as I would have been if I'd done this right out of college.
- But I had a feeling that the students were as smart as I was. You know, you have a feeling that your students probably are second guessing you when you first start teaching--at least if you're like me you do, because I didn't think of myself as much of an authority on anything.
- That first class was really interesting. There were thirty to forty people in it, and there was one girl who sat in the front row, looking bored. And in the back row there was one who always looked enthusiastic. I couldn't look at the front row girl because it made all my words dry up in my throat, so I looked at the girl in the back row. But they both turned out to be my best students, both the enthusiastic one and the one that looked bored. You can't go by people's facial expressions.
- Riess: You didn't think of the state college students as a kind of an inferior breed of students.
- M. Foster: Not at all--well, to a certain extent, you know--but you'd find that anyplace. Maybe you wouldn't find it at Cal.

I also decided to teach symbolic anthropology. I taught folklore, which I never--I was always teaching courses I never had taken. I never had taken introductory linguistics because I had gotten into linguistics sort of by the back door, because I had already written a grammar, so I already knew grammar, which was a good thing.

Riess: And if you didn't have a textbook that you could rely on?

M. Foster: I've forgotten what textbooks I used. I did use textbooks.

But I started out assigning grammars to students, because I wanted the students to get an idea of what a whole language that was not like theirs could be like. Some of them adored it, and some of them were so frustrated by it because they couldn't make heads or tails of it--so it was not a good maneuver really. It was great for the ones that really caught on to it.

Riess: Did you enjoy the office hours and the kind of one-on-one?

M. Foster: Oh, I always enjoyed the students.

One thing that affected me about students was how badly they wrote. No professors ever really corrected their writing. I've discussed this with lots of people who have gone to graduate school at the University of Chicago and Columbia and Harvard who have told me that nobody ever gave them any assistance in writing. George always did. George's students--some of them would be mad at him at the time because he was critical, but they always praised him later because he'd helped them so much.

I felt as if you shouldn't just mark students papers wrong--you know, it was a carryover from my high school. I told you about this history teacher in high school who said I didn't know how to outline, but didn't teach me how to outline! I was determined if I was going to teach, I was not going to make that kind of mistake with students.

So many students had good ideas, but not the vaguest idea how to present them. If you were an impatient professor you would just give them a D or an F and forget it. But I couldn't. It was fortunate that I didn't have very large classes, because I could discuss with my students ways that they might be able to present the problems that they had and how they might be able to express themselves--I would have to dig and delve to really understand the points they were trying to make. It took a lot of time, but I found it useful and interesting work.

Riess: Are any of them today working on things with you?

M. Foster: No. That was a long time ago.

Riess: Of course, that wasn't graduate level anyway.

M. Foster: No. While I was at Hayward they instituted a master's degree in anthropology, but that's as far as it went. I always have regretted that I didn't have graduate students. It would have been much more stimulating.

Symposium on Symbolism at Burg Wartenstein ##

Riess: Today we were planning to talk about the symposium on symbolism that you did at Burg Wartenstein. And symbolic anthropology.

M. Foster: Yes. Well, I began getting interested in all sorts of symbolism. That's why I taught folklore too, and I really enjoyed teaching symbolic anthropology because I could be as far out as I wanted--like in the Kent Cambodia crisis where I put all the turmoil to good use. I had students doing term papers on things like street naming, all kinds of things that you would find around town. Uses of language that they would come up with and write interesting term papers, so I found that quite a lot of fun.

And I liked teaching, but George wouldn't hear of my taking a permanent, full-time job. Probably if he'd been willing I would have, except that it was hard going to a campus that was that far away and commuting. As it was, I only had to go three times a week. If I'd had a full-time job, I would have had to go every day, so I don't know what I would have done, but I would have liked to have a full-time job.

Riess: Those were also the years of so much travel with George.

M. Foster: Yes. That was another thing. I had my fieldwork and my own things I wanted to be doing, so I probably wouldn't have unless it could have been at Cal.

Riess: You taught at Hayward for how long?

M. Foster: Nine years.

Riess: Now, you wanted to talk about actually organizing the symposium at Burg Wartenstein.

M. Foster: Yes. But the first symposium I organized was for the American Anthropological Association annual meeting which was unusual because it was out of the country--it was in Mexico City. I think it's the only one that's been held outside of the country. I think I told you that Robert Rubinstein gave a

paper at that Mexico City meeting and I heard his paper. I didn't know him, but I remembered him from that meeting. In any event I organized a symposium on symbolic anthropology [Form and Formative in the Symbolic Process, Mexico City, 1974.]

Riess: [looking at list of publications] You were the organizer, with Peter Claus?

M. Foster: That's right. Peter was a fellow teacher with me at Hayward. He's still there, very nice.

And so then I suggested to Lita Osmundsen, who was the director of the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the only organization that specifically supports anthropology--I suggested a symposium on symbolism.

Riess: The Fundamentals of Symbolism, 1977.

M. Foster: Yes. The Wenner-Gren Foundation had a castle in Austria for a good number of years, a wonderful place for conferences. George had been at three conferences there, and I had actually been to stay there--I'm about the only wife that was ever invited to come. They were very strict about not having spouses, but they did allow me to come, and I was there just that one night.²

I went to Europe all of those times, and the first time I took a side trip with the wife of Evan Vogt at Harvard, Nan Vogt. She had been before to a little village in the Austrian mountains called Obernberg, and she and I went there together, and she broke me into Obernberg, which was one of the most delightful experiences of my life. I absolutely adored Obernberg.

A Trip to Obernberg

M. Foster: Then after my conference at Burg Wartenstein in 1977, Christine Blaisdell came over from Berkeley and joined me to go to Obernberg--so I had two experiences at Obernberg. I wanted to go back because it's the most beautiful place in the world.

²See George M. Foster oral history for more on the story of Mickie Foster's visit to Burg Wartenstein castle.

Riess: Why is it the most beautiful place in the world?

M. Foster: Well, it's a green valley with a beautiful clear stream running down the middle of it and mountains rising up both sides and a little church. It's a picture-perfect little village, and Austria is organized in such a way that there are trails you can hike everywhere.

When I had my conference at Burg Wartenstein we had one free day in the middle of the week-long conferences where people could go and do what they want to. Most people went down to Vienna and went to the museum and things like that. But I knew Vienna very well, so I didn't need to see Vienna-- anyway, I found it so stimulating and so exhausting being responsible for this conference, I was just steamed up the whole time. I loved having a day when I could just do what I wanted to do.

So I went off by myself. I got a guide to the trails, and just spent the whole day hiking in the woods. Never met a soul. Beautifully done trails, but nobody. It was--I think it's about the only time in my life I've just gone off for a whole day when I never saw anybody.

##

M. Foster: I was talking about going to Obernberg with Christine Blaisdell. Before we went, after the symposium, we met in Vienna and went to a toy store. Melissa, my daughter, was also one of the participants in my symposium, and she and Christine and I went to the toy store so that Melissa could buy presents for her little children, and Christine and I for our grandchildren. And for ourselves Christine and I bought a wonderful jigsaw puzzle that looked just like Obernberg, a beautiful mountain valley with a little church.

Christine and I would hike all day long, and then we'd come home and we'd--there was a little shop where you could buy slivovitz--we'd buy little bottles of slivovitz and we'd take a shower and then we'd sit down and work our jigsaw puzzle with our slivovitz. We just managed to get this jigsaw puzzle put together by the time we left Obernberg. Christine took it with her, and Christine had it ever since. After Christine died, I asked her children if I could have the puzzle, so I have the puzzle now. The puzzle is so much like Obernberg, and reminds me of the fun that Christine and I had--we spent so much time laughing during doing that puzzle.

Riess: That's a perfect memory.

Organizing the Symposium

Riess: So now, putting together the symposium, the ideas for the symposium, tell me about it.

M. Foster: First of all, if you organize a Wenner-Gren symposium--and they don't have the castle at Burg Wartenstein anymore, so they have to have their symposia in other parts of the world--it has to be international. You can't have all American anthropologists, and you have to find anthropologists, and if they can't afford to come, you've got to fund them.

And you assign somebody to be your *rapporteur*, who takes notes and is sort of responsible for the paperwork. I asked Stanley Brandes--at that point not still a graduate student, but not very much past it--I asked him if he'd like to be my *rapporteur*. So when it came time to do the book, which was a compilation of the papers with the commentary and so on, I asked Stanley if he'd like to co-edit the book with me. The book, *Symbol as Sense*, was the upshot of the symposium.³

Wenner-Gren always has you write your paper ahead of time. They print up the papers, and you have the papers, so the people that are participating don't give their papers--the papers are there for everybody to read.

Riess: Oh, that is interesting.

M. Foster: You have carte blanche to organize your symposium, so I organized it in such a way that everybody had three choices of which paper they'd like to discuss. I would give them their first choice as much as I could, and then I'd fit them in, so then everybody's paper got discussed by somebody. And of all the papers, the one that people all wanted to discuss was Melissa's. [laughs] My paper was not particularly popular to be discussed, but Melissa's paper--they were fighting over it--her paper was far and away the most popular paper at this conference.

Riess: She was doing work that was so different?

M. Foster: Well, it was such a good paper. No, everybody was doing something very different from everybody else. In fact, a lot of the early discussion had to do with what people meant by

³*Symbol as Sense*, edited by Mary LeCron Foster and Stanley H. Brandes. Academic Press, 1980.

symbolism. You know, we had a lot of terminology problems that we had to get sorted out just to get started.

Melissa's field is child language acquisition, and she gave a paper on children learning their first language, but it was so stimulating--you know, it wasn't what you would necessarily call anthropology.

Riess: You were trying to hammer out what people meant by symbolism? There was a lot of talk about the definition?

M. Foster: Yes. Each day one of the people would discuss the papers he or she had become the discussant for, and that meant that there was always a session where you focused on the paper of each person, so that the topics all got covered within discussion, which was, I thought, a pretty good way to handle it. And since you were there a whole week, you had quite a lot of time for discussion--not just discussion in the sessions, but discussion at the dinner or at other times. It was a really good give and take the whole time.

Riess: It must make you very close to that handful of people.

M. Foster: Well, we certainly--I don't think I was as close to them as they were to each other, because I was having to do the thinking-through all the time actually. Also, I was given the most beautiful room in the castle--bedroom, sleeping quarters--in the castle, so I could be off by myself. All the others were pretty much heaped up together, and they didn't have responsibilities, so I think that they all got to be really, really good friends.

Riess: Did you have to sum up every day? In some sense?

M. Foster: No, I didn't have to sum up. I had to keep things on track. No, the people that were responsible for the papers did whatever summing up was needed for that particular kind of discussion. But I had to keep it on track. I was the chair.

It was very exciting. I mean there were so many smart people with so many clever, stimulating ideas that I think it was the most exciting week of my life, really.

Language Origins Society

Riess: You have been working on the origins of language, and you have talked about that. In a note to me you also mentioned the Language Origins Society.

M. Foster: And you asked about glossogenetics.⁴ That was the start of the Language Origins Society. It was a conference in Paris set up by a French--I don't know what to call him, not a real linguist, but he's interested in language. He worked for UNESCO and he set it up with UNESCO, and he got people to come that were interested, but most of them were biologists. That's the problem with the Language Origins Society as it has carried on--it doesn't include real linguists.

The Language Origins Society is kind of an oddball bunch of people--I shouldn't say that, I'm an oddball too, you see--but kind of far-out people who are working in strange ways. I don't know quite how to put it. Some of them are pretty well founded and some of them are kind of off the wall. And there's no screening, anybody can come to give a paper. It can be kind of intellectually ungrounded, or it can be really stimulating.

This kind of lunatic-fringe thinking easily gets embedded in discussions of language origins, and often has to do with discoveries in the New World that point to Old World origins. There's enough of a lunatic fringe there so that hardly anybody who's a serious academic will pay any attention to it. And that's where my problem is--walking this tightrope, trying not to get branded with this general feeling that people have.

Because I'm absolutely convinced that you can trace language from the Old World to the New World, I have done a lot of thorough, factual research on it. But the minute you mention it to linguists, they find some little minor flaw, some little thing you overlooked that isn't even important, and then they just kind of stop listening.

Riess: Why did the Language Origins Society group begin in 1985? What was the impetus?

M. Foster: Well, I was trying to tell you. Eric de Grolier, with UNESCO, organized the conference in Paris. Then some of the people, particularly a couple of Dutch scientists--one was biological,

⁴The Transdisciplinary Symposium on Glossogenetics, UNESCO, Paris, August 1981, mentioned in a note from Foster to the interviewer.

one was linguistic--they really were the ones who carried the ball and got the society going. There were enough people that were there, and enough people continue to get interested, so that it became a society and it has kept going.

This year will be the sixteenth annual meeting, and I've just sent in an abstract for it. It takes place every other year in the states--I've gone to it when it's out of the country, but recently I haven't--and this time it's at Rutgers, in September, and I might conceivably be able to go. I like the people, I have good friends that are members. None of them really understand what I'm doing despite the fact that I've given paper after paper. It's something that's very difficult to get people to understand.

Riess: And are they working on things that are equally profound and difficult?

M. Foster: I expect they'd say so. They come at it from all sorts of points of view, but they don't come at it from language. The received wisdom in linguistics circles, in every elementary linguistic textbook, is that you cannot reconstruct language back beyond Indo-European, which is eight to ten thousand years, something like that. In spite of the fact that Indo-European has been reconstructed in its entirety almost, and if people really were serious about it, they could reconstruct other language families and compare those to Indo-European.

But you don't even have to do that, because every language has these regularities--by means of comparison you can take it back to its real origin, you don't have to take it back only to its familial source. That's what people won't believe.

Global Language Reconstruction

Riess: Sounds like a lot of frustration over the years.

M. Foster: Well, it's terribly frustrating. But all the time you see I'm working on this, I'm having so much fun. It's the world's most fun project, it's a puzzle to end all puzzles, and you make discoveries constantly. Every day that I work on it I make two or three new wonderful discoveries that are very exhilarating. As long as I'm quietly sitting in my cell with my books around me and all my dictionaries, I'm having a hell of a good time.

Riess: That's a great image, like monks with scripts that they're translating.

M. Foster: Exactly. Exactly. So I'm having fun. But because I've had such trouble trying to get it across to anyone--it just doesn't--I kind of lost my verve for trying to convince people. And I do write papers, and I've written two or three rather encyclopedic papers for volumes with deep-level interest. But I don't get much reaction from it. People don't understand, no matter how clear I try to make it.

Riess: Let me ask a sort of an inflammatory question. Does George understand it?

M. Foster: [laughs] George told me the other day that he understood it for the first time. After years that he really hasn't understood it, and he doesn't understand it at any depth.

A philosopher friend who has written a lot of books on the roots of language, evolutionary philosophy sort of thing, she has been absolutely mad about my theory ever since the beginning.⁵ She got in touch with me years ago and we've been communicating ever since. She's had a hard time becoming mainstream. She's had a job--not a tenure track job, but some sort of a job for the University of Oregon--and she does have this kind of connection now. She's had a harder time than I have getting in the mainstream.

Well, she was all of a sudden invited to go to the conference in San Marino--this little principality or whatever it is in the middle of Italy, a terrible place actually. Umberto Eco has started this institute. It's based on the theories of Charles Sanders Peirce on language, and it's a very formal theory, and there's an anthropologist at Indiana University named Tom [Thomas Albert] Sebeok who has pushed it in this country. This conference that is organized by Umberto Eco has invited Maxine to come and be one of the speakers, and her paper is about my theory.

She knows I've been working on this book all along, and so she keeps wanting me to finish the book, which, of course, I'm very slow to do. It has to have so much detail that it's very difficult to get it into shape. I have the text pretty well laid out, but not the examples which I've got to give.

⁵Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Roots of Thinking*, Temple University Press, 1990.

She wanted me to write this up in six or eight sentences so that she could present something that I had written at this conference. She sent me her paper, and it's a terribly good paper, she writes beautifully. She's really very, very smart and so it has always been nice for me to have her being so enthusiastic about me.

Riess: So her whole paper is about you? Or about your theory?

M. Foster: Pretty much about my theory.

Riess: And have you written your part?

M. Foster: Yes, but you don't know how difficult it is to boil down a book into six cogent sentences.

I finally got this done and I ran it off my computer, showed it to George, and he said for the first time he understood it, but I don't think--he might not have if he hadn't been trying to read all these other things in the meantime. Somehow or other there is just some way that I worded something that gave him more of an insight.

People have different kinds of frames of reference. I notice this always when somebody's giving a talk. The kind of questions that people ask, or the way they zero in on the thinking of the person who has been speaking, has only to do with their own work. Their own frame of reference.

Riess: Sort of an economic view, of how does this serve me?

M. Foster: Yes. Now people don't--it's not selfish. It's just the way people's minds work. I'm sure that I'm that way too if the thing that interests me is something other people don't even notice, because they don't have my same theory.

My theory basically is that human language and all of human culture arose in an evolutionary sense, because hominids or hominoids--at what point you can't say in the past, in the paleolithic--began to operate with analogy. They increasingly saw things as "like." To try to get this across to people is just like--worse than pulling teeth.

You just can't get the idea through because people's minds don't work that way--except for a few like Maxine. There are a few others, but Maxine has been the closest to really understanding it, from a philosophical standpoint, evolution, and probably because she writes all these evolutionary books. She sees just as clearly as I do that if there hadn't been this

gradual movement toward seeing things as "like" and acting upon it there could not have been human culture. But why people can't get that is just beyond me.

The Devil--and God too--is in the details, and linguistic details are pretty daunting to many people.

Riess: Perhaps you've put it simply and perfectly this time around.

M. Foster: I spend hours poring through the thesaurus to get exactly the right wording, because the whole thing depends on exactly what you're saying. Language is so loose. You know, you can say things in a hundred different ways but not really get at the essence of what you're trying to say, which is exactly what I was telling you about the students' papers where you have to be pretty astute to see, "Oh, yes, that's what they mean, but they don't know how to say it."

Riess: This is satisfying, isn't it, Mickie, that your theory will be presented.

M. Foster: Oh, well, God knows, I've had these things in the past where I thought, "Oh, this is good, now maybe we'll get somewhere." So I don't know. She left yesterday for Italy and she--her husband's also a philosopher, and after they go to this meeting they're going to a meeting in Denmark, so they're not going to get back for quite a long time.

I said, "Well, send me a postcard, and tell me how it went." [laughs] Because she's just as frustrated as I am. She's been trying to get this kind of thing across and I'm sort of her ace in the hole because she thinks I'm a genius because of this language thing. I don't know that I'm a genius--I guess I'm just awfully persistent.

Riess: And where did she first encounter your thinking?

M. Foster: I don't know. She was in the east and she wrote to me. She was at Tulane or someplace like that. Actually, she started as a dancer, so what she's interested in is the body and bodily movement and that's what she liked about my theory, because it talks about language as gesture, as very fine bodily gesture.

She put on a conference up in Oregon a few years back and wrote and edited a book of papers, of which mine was one--the

title of the book is *Giving the Body Its Due*.⁶ In a sense the paper that I wrote for that is probably the easiest one for nonlinguists or nonanthropologists to understand. I haven't had much reaction to that either. I just basically haven't had much reaction except for a few people that are really struck. They think this is extraordinary.

Structuralism, An Epiphany, and a Model ##

M. Foster: Structuralism--that's another epiphany for me, because it's linguistics that got me thinking structurally. Now I'm not sure that I did before, and I certainly never would have thought of it on my own, but I love the structural side of linguistics and I love symbolic structuralism. I think human beings think structurally. I think we organize our lives structurally.

This has to do with the use of analogy too. We organize things in terms of categories, because we see them as "like" in certain kinds of ways. So if it weren't for seeing things as like, you couldn't have any structure. If you write grammars, as I have--if you take unknown languages and write grammars--you have to figure out the rules to figure out the structure. This certainly gives you a firm sense of structure.

That's one reason that I hate the fact that linguistics has been getting weaker within anthropology than it used to be, because anthropology students aren't getting as structural a sense as they could have. In fact, structuralism is on the wane in anthropology. I think it'll be revived, but at the moment, it's weak.

Riess: What's the opposite of structuralism in this case?

M. Foster: Postmodernism. [laughs]

I'm a firm believer in the fact that nothing comes out of nothing. You can't have something unless you've got something there to begin with. Everything builds from everything else, so that the minute you start sweeping the baby out with the

⁶*Giving the Body its Due*, edited by Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, State University of New York Press, 1992.

bath water, you're not getting anywhere. You've got to build on what went before. So that's why I don't like people like Chomsky--he wanted to sweep all of structural linguistics out, claiming he wasn't doing structuralism. Of course he was, but in a different kind of way. But he lost a lot in the process. He gained some things, but he lost more in a way.

Riess: You said in a letter to me that structuralism was your model for looking at all living things.

M. Foster: I think it has become that. I don't think it was all the way up--maybe it was, but I just didn't recognize it. It's kind of hard to think yourself back into your old phases.

Riess: I don't know what my model is for looking at the world.

M. Foster: Well, I know that that's at least one way of looking at the world. I also am very interested in the human imagination, and I'm interested in religion from that standpoint, because I think that religion is a very interesting example of the human structural imagination at work.

Riess: Creating structure.

M. Foster: Creating structures, creating belief systems that can be sustaining. I mean it's perfectly obvious that a lot of people get a lot of strength out of religion. It just doesn't happen to be my way of getting strength, and I think it's man-made--human-made, we're not supposed to talk about "man" any more. And I don't want to give it all to man either. [laughs]

Riess: You've said that anthropology as a discipline makes for tolerance and appreciation of social and individual differences.

M. Foster: It does.

Riess: I wonder if you can give examples. It seems to me most apropos to your work in peace and conflict.

M. Foster: Well, yes. That's why Robert and I became such good friends and did these books together and conferences and all the things we did--have done, still are doing--because Robert is now on the Ploughshares board with me. And one of the best things that happened to Ploughshares was that they took Robert.

My days in Ploughshares are going to be numbered, any way you look at it, but I feel much better about Ploughshares because of Robert. Robert and I look at peace and conflict in

exactly the same way, as anthropologists, which means that we look at human society and the way humans solve problems, and understand that conflict is inevitable, but that there are ways that human societies have dealt with it that vary and that are more--or less--destructive.

There isn't just one way to deal with conflict--there are all kinds of ways to deal with conflict. Of course, the kind of societies that anthropologists have in the past focused on have not had wars in the sense that we've had wars. They've had fights, but there's no human society that's totally peaceful, even societies organized structurally in such a way that people can get along. You have to keep working at it all the time, and things can break down, things change.

What Robert's doing running the peace and conflict studies program at Syracuse is training students to look at the human elements instead of just the technological aspects of it.

Ploughshares, Reasons for Optimism

Riess: And what is Ploughshares working on now?

M. Foster: Ploughshares started out as being anti-nuclear. That was the big threat, and that's when I got into it, because it just seemed as if during the cold war it was such a frightening thing. Actually things are really more frightening now, partly because of these nuclear genies out of the bottle, partly all sorts of other things--biological weapons, all sorts of weapons of mass destruction. What Ploughshares supports is projects that go to work to try to improve or help or solve or whatnot--and they're wonderful.

It's lots of fun to be on the Ploughshares board because there are so many good ideas coming along that get presented to us. And we have such a good staff. They're so good at screening projects and getting in touch with everybody that will have any insight into this particular thing. And they talk to them, so that when we have board meetings, and we have to decide on how we're spending our money--because all we do is take in money in order to give it away. We have to know how we're using our resources.

Ploughshares is absolutely unique. Everybody thinks so. Anybody that's working on peace and conflict thinks that Ploughshares is extraordinary, so it's gratifying to be part of

it and very, very interesting. The meeting has just been held in New York, and I had hoped I could go, but I couldn't.

Riess: That must be satisfying to look back at--that work.

M. Foster: It's fun. I guess there are three things intellectually that I get the most satisfaction out of. The first is most on my mind these days, because I'm trying so hard to bring it along far enough to leave it--and that's the language origins material. But working on peace and conflict is endlessly stimulating--discouraging too, but I think there's more to being encouraged by. The third is cultural symbolism and how it is played out socially in different societies.

If you're doing something that you think is really valuable, and you can see progress, you enjoy yourself, even if there are things that you're really worried about. And there are lots of things I'm worried about. I always have said I was an optimist and George was a pessimist. George says it's better to be a pessimist, because then you're pleasantly surprised. And the minute I get worried about something, George says, "See! You're a pessimist." [laughs] Which really isn't true.

Riess: But if you're an optimist, then when bad things occur isn't it more frightening? The pessimist expects the endless blows.

M. Foster: I don't think so. I can absorb a great deal and I'm an optimist. In fact, I think I can absorb more than most people.

Riess: I think you've demonstrated that, as a matter of fact.

Peace and conflict is an interesting way of looking at human relations.

M. Foster: Well, yes. That's why it needs anthropologists. That's why I worked hard to get anthropologists involved. It wasn't so much that I expected to solve the problems myself, you know. And I don't think problems get solved; I think problems get improved, and new problems come along.

But as far as optimism and pessimism are concerned, I'm not at all sure but what we're destroying a world--I think we probably are. I'm very worried about the environment and what's happening to the environment. And I look at the good projects that are saving people--and there are too many people! So I'm pretty pessimistic, if you want to call it that, about what happens to the world.

Things have improved and deteriorated, but they gradually over the long haul are probably deteriorating--because we've gotten too powerful for our own good, too technologically powerful.

Riess: Global warming, I guess, is one of the best examples.

M. Foster: That's a very good example. And I don't think that the human race is going to stop in its tracks and take stock of what it's doing and change it unless maybe some belief system--some religious system--will spring up that frightens people enough, or makes people start taking a different tack. So in that way I think belief systems can be all to the good.

Riess: Something like Buddhism, which respects every living thing.

M. Foster: I think Buddhism is fine. Every time I say that to George he says, "But they believe in reincarnation." [laughs] He's just as atheistic as I am. Being atheistic doesn't mean that I don't see the power in religion. It might be that religion would save the world. Who knows? It's just that I couldn't make myself believe in it, because I think it's man-made.

I can believe in people though. I could believe that human beings could save themselves, but I don't think it has got to come from on high. And if I had to worry about what was going to happen to me in the next world, I would be in despair. I would be worried the whole time. To me, it's just--I'm just gone.

Okay! I hope I'm not totally gone. I suppose I'd like to lead my life in such a way that I felt as if I left more good than bad behind. In fact, I'm sure I do. I think that's certainly a motivation for a lot of things I do. But as far as I myself being left somewhere, God forbid. I really can't understand people that have to perpetuate themselves.

Riess: Perpetuate themselves?

M. Foster: That there's an afterlife for us.

Riess: I have a way that I think about my parents, both of whom are dead, "seeing" what I am doing--gardening, playing the piano, whatever--and approving. It's a fantasy that pleases me.

M. Foster: That's fine. I just don't happen to think of it that way. But when you said something you do in the garden, or what have you, you know, if I have a dinner party--and I like to set tables so I like the way things look, or arrange flowers or something

like that. I'm just as happy with something temporary like that as I am with something more permanent. You get a feeling of satisfaction. You've satisfied yourself, but in the process you've probably satisfied something in your parents that liked to do the same things. George's mother, for instance, loved to set tables too, and she and I--this was a bond between us, that we enjoyed fixing things so they looked nice or appealed to us. And so I sometimes think if I set a nice table that she would have enjoyed that, but it doesn't occur to me to think that maybe she does. [laughs]

Riess: Maybe no parent gets sufficiently acknowledged in their lifetime.

M. Foster: I wake up at three a.m. or four a.m. and lie there thinking of all kinds of things, and one morning recently I began thinking about my mother and how really, truly wonderful my mother was--all sorts of things that I don't normally take time to think of about my mother. Unless I get into that frame of mind. I can't even reconstruct exactly what it was that particular morning seemed to me to be so marvelous about my mother, and ways that I benefitted from my mother.

In general I think I probably--well, I don't know--I was going to say I thought I benefitted more from my father. I was very fortunate in my parents and the fact that my parents were as unrigid as they were. Well, my father, sometimes when we were growing up he'd suddenly put his foot down and pound the table, insist on this or that. So there was something of the "life with father" thing that George partook of more than I did. George's father was quite a quiet man.

Riess: I think men have some terrible burden of being sort of the autocrat at the breakfast table.

M. Foster: Except that they want to be. They feel that they've got to be in control. George certainly has to be in control, and I've always given him control--too much according to George's mother. [laughs] She said, "Don't always give in to George."

Finale

M. Foster: As I complete my oral history I have also completed my eighty-sixth year.⁷ I doubt if anyone but me has learned anything

⁷This finale was added by Foster, sent by email on March 3, 2001.

from this long account--but I have learned a great deal. The major lesson is that the apple does not fall far from the tree, no matter to what extent the apple feels a distance from its early roots.

I have moved great distances from Des Moines, Iowa, and yet, in many senses I am still there. Des Moines is one of those place which, like Peoria, is all too facilely held up to satire and ridicule--the milk-toast of my childhood sick-bed has somewhat the same soothing effect on me as did the madeleines of greater renown.

When Bunny and I were little girls Mumsie had us each memorize a short nursery poem. Mine was, "The world is so full of a number of things, I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings." While I long ago lost the assurance of a king's state of enduring happiness, I think my happiness is because I retain a state of wonder at all that the world holds, a world that has endowed me with such a wonderful husband, family, and friends, and health and loci in and through which to live these numbers of "kingly" wonders.

TAPE GUIDE--Mary LeCron Foster

Interview 1: January 24, 2000	
Tape 1, Side A	1
Tape 1, Side B	10
Tape 2, Side A	19
Tape 2, Side B	28
Interview 2: January 28, 2000	
Tape 3, Side A	36
Tape 3, Side B	43
Tape 4, Side A	49
Tape 4, Side B	55
Interview 3: February 2, 2000	
Tape 5, Side A	61
Tape 5, Side B	68
Insert from Tape 6, Side B	76
Tape 6, Side A	77
Interview 4: February 4, 2000	
Tape 7, Side A	86
Tape 7, Side B	92
Tape 8, Side A	98
Tape 8, Side B	103
Interview 5: February 8, 2000	
Tape 9, Side A	111
Tape 9, Side B	113
Tape 10, Side A	123
Tape 10, Side B	130
Insert from Tape 11, Side A	133
Interview 6: March 22, 2000	
Tape 11, Side A	140
Tape 11, Side B	145
Tape 12, Side A	152
Tape 12, Side B	159
Interview 7: March 29, 2000	
Tape 13, Side A	160
Tape 13, Side B	166
Tape 14, Side A	172
Tape 14, Side B not recorded	

Interview 8: March 31, 2000	
Tape 15, Side A	179
Tape 15, Side B	186
Interview 9: May 2, 2000	
Tape 17, Side A	195
Tape 17, Side B	200
Tape 18, Side A moved to Interview 10	
Tape 18, Side B	204
Insert from Tape 19, Side B	209
Interview 10: May 16, 2000	
Insert from later in Tape 19, Side A	217
Tape 19, Side A	221
Tape 18, Side A	223
Tape 19, Side B	231

APPENDICES

A	Mary LeCron Foster Curriculum Vitae	241
B	Robert Rubinstein's Remarks at Fosters' March 5, 2001, Oral History Presentation	248
C	"Countering Offense: Institutionalized Alternatives to Military Action," text of a talk by Mary LeCron Foster	253
D	Introduction, by Mary LeCron Foster, to <i>The Life of Symbols</i> , edited by Mary LeCron Foster and Lucy Jayne Botscharow, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1990.	279
E	"Language Origins Research: A Brief Review of Methodology and Findings," Mary LeCron Foster, interviewed by Jan Thomas, January 5, 2001	287
E	"Cognitive Requisites for Language," a talk delivered to the Language Origins Society, 1991	312
F	April 8, 2000, notes from Foster to Riess	318
G	"Fostering New Ways to Prevent Conflict, Mickie Foster and the Cowles Fund," from the newsletter of The Ploughshares Fund, Summer 2000	pocket, inside back cover

MARY LeCRON FOSTER**CURRICULUM VITAE**

Home Address: 790 San Luis Road, Berkeley, CA 94707

University Address: Department of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720

Home Phone: (510) 525-2171

Husband: George McClelland Foster, Jr.

Children: Jeremy Foster, Melissa Bowerman (Van Schuur)

EDUCATION:

1936 B.A. (cum laude) (Anthropology) Northwestern University

1965 Ph.D. (Linguistics) University of California, Berkeley

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

1955-1956 Research Associate, Department of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley: planning and execution of all Anthropology Museum exhibits.

1962, 1965, 1973, 1975, 1978, 1979, 1981 Assisted George M. Foster in evaluation of community development and public health programs (AID, WHO) in Northern Rhodesia, Nepal, Indonesia, India/Sri Lanka, Malaysia, India/Nepal, India/Thailand/Indonesia/Sri Lanka, in the above years respectively.

1966-1975 Assistant Professor, Lecturer, Department of Anthropology, California State University, Hayward. Development and initiation of programs in linguistics and symbolic anthropology.

1977 Interviewing for, and preparation of, a report on provision of social needs in the city of Hayward, CA, for the Hayward City Council and Needs Assessment Committee.

1980 Lecturer, Fromm Institute of Lifelong Learning, University of San Francisco, San Francisco, CA.

1975-present Research Associate, Department of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley.

FIELD RESEARCH:

1941 Social anthropological and linguistic research among the Sierra Popoluca Indians, Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Mexico.

1959 to present Near-yearly, or bi-yearly, field periods varying from two weeks to six months in length for social anthropological and linguistic research among the Tarascan Indians and mestizo peoples of the State of Michoacan, Mexico.

MONOGRAPHS AND BOOKS:

- 1948 (with George M. Foster) *Sierra Popoluca Speech*, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, Institute of Social Anthropology, Publication No. 8.
- 1969 *The Tarascan Language*, University of California Publications in Linguistics 56. Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press.
- 1980 Editor (with Stanley H. Brandes), *Symbol As Sense: New Approaches to the Analysis of Meaning*, New York: Academic Press.
- 1986 Editor (with Robert A. Rubinstein), *Peace and War: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.
- 1988a Editor (with Robert A. Rubinstein) *The Social Dynamics of Peace and Conflict: Culture in International Security*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- 1988b Editor (with Robert A. Rubinstein) *International Directory of Anthropologists Working in the Areas of Peace, Conflict-Resolution, and International Security*. Evanston, IL: IUAES Commission on the Study of Peace/Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research.
- 1990 Editor (with Lucy Jayne Botsharow), *The Life of Symbols*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

ARTICLES:

- 1968 Componential analysis of grammar: the Tarascan verb. *International Journal of American Linguistics* 34: 259-68.
- 1971 Tarascan. In Jesse Sawyer, Ed., *Studies in American Indian Languages*. University of California Publications in Linguistics 65: 77-111. Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press.
- 1974 Deep structure in symbolic anthropology. *Ethos* 2: 334-355.
- 1977 (with Peggy Golde) Hayward at the Crossroads: In-depth Interview Report, Appendix E, *City of Hayward Needs Assessment Report*, Hayward, CA.
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- 1979 Synthesis and antithesis in Balinese ritual. In Alton A. Becker and Aram A. Yengoyan, eds., *The Imagination of Reality: Essays in Southeast Asian Symbolic Systems*, 175-196. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- 1980a Speaking of energy. Appendix 2, *Report of the Lifestyles and Energy Resource Group*, National Academy of Sciences Committee on Nuclear and Alternative Energy Systems. Washington, D.C.: National Academy of Sciences.

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- 1981 Culture as metaphor: a new look at language and culture in the Pleistocene. *Kroeber Anthropological Society Papers* 59 and 60 (Spring and Fall, 1979), 1-12.
- 1982 Meaning as metaphor. *Quaderni di Semantica*, Vol. III, No. 1, 95-102, and Vol. III, no. 2, 313-321.
- 1983a Solving the insoluble: language genetics today. In Eric de Grolier, ed., *Glossogenetics: The Origin and Evolution of Language*, 455-480. Paris: Harwood Academic Publishers.
- 1983b Tzintzuntzan marriage: an analysis of concordant structure. In Jarich Oosten and Arie de Ruyter, eds., *The Future of Structuralism*, 127-152. Gottingen, West Germany: Editions Herodot.
- 1985 Structural hierarchy and social good in Tzintzuntzan. *International Journal of Psychology* 20, 617-635.
- 1986a Anthropology for peace. *Anthropology Today*, 2:1.
- 1986b Is war necessary? In Mary LeCron Foster and Robert A. Rubenstein, Eds., *Peace and War: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, 71-78. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.
- 1987a Cross-cultural approaches to problems of peace and war: the generation of theory. *Newsletter of the Commission on the Study of Peace, International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences*, 5:1, March, 2-9.
- 1987b Primordial language reconstruction. *California Linguistic Newsletter*. Vol XIX: 8-11.
- 1988a Cultural triggering of psychological reversals. In M. J. Apter, J.H. Kerr, and M. Cowles eds., *Progress in Reversal Theory*, 63-75. Amsterdam: North Holland.
- 1988b Image and substance in modern American military policy. *Human Peace: Newsletter of the Commission on the Study of Peace, International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences*. Vol. 6, No. 9, 3-6.
- 1989 Toward interpretation of ancient Tarascan terminology. In Yolotl Gonzalez, coordinadora, *Homenaje a Isabel Kelly*. Mexico, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropologia e Historia, 149-160.
- 1990a Symbolic origins and transitions in the Palaeolithic. In Paul Mellars, ed. *The Emergence of Modern Humans: An Archaeological Perspective*, Vol. 2, 517-539. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press.
- 1990b Analogy, language, and the symbolic process. In M.L. Foster and L.J. Botscharow, eds., *The Life of Symbols*, 81-94. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- 1990c The birth and life of signs. In M. L. Foster and L.J. Botscharow, eds., *The Life of Symbols*, 285-306. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

- 1990d The causes of conflict. ICIS Forum 20.3. 22-29.
- 1992 Body process in the evolution of language. In Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, ed., *Giving the Body its Due: Challenges to a Cartesian Metaphysics*, 208-230. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- 1993 Reversal theory and the institutionalization of war. In John H. Kerr, Stephen Murgatroyd, and Michael J. Apter, eds., Amsterdam: Swets and Zeitlinger. *Advances in Reversal Theory*, 67-74.
- 1994a Symbolism: The foundation of human culture. In Tim Ingold, ed. *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology: Humanity, Culture, and Social Life*, 366-395. London: Routledge.
- 1994b Language as analogic strategy: suggestions for evolutionary research. In L.H. Rolfe, A. Jonker, and J. Wind, eds., *Studies in Language Origins, Vol.3.* 179-204. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- 1996a The problem of origins. (Review article of Kathleen R. Gibson and Tim Ingold, eds. *Tools, Language and Cognition in Human Evolution*. Cambridge University Press, 1993, and Joel Walman. *Aping Languages*. Cambridge University Press, 1992.) *Reviews in Anthropology*, Vol. 24, 239-249.
- 1996b Reconstruction of the evolution of human spoken language. In Andrew Lock and Charles Peters, eds. *Handbook of Symbolic Evolution..* 747-772. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 1999 On Transpacific Contact: Language and Myth. *Pre-Columbiana: A Journal of Long-Distance Contacts Vol I*

SYMPOSIA AND INVITED LECTURES:

- 1974 Organizer (with Peter Claus) of the symposium, *Form and Formative in the Symbolic Process*. 73rd Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Mexico City, Nov. 19-24. Paper presented: Metaphors of space.
- 1975 Symbolic sets, presented at the symposium *Toward an Ideational Dimension in Archaeology*. Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology, Dallas, May 8.
- 1977 Organizer, *Fundamentals of Symbolism*, Burg Wartenstein Symposium 74, Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, Austria, July 19-24. Paper presented: The growth of symbolism in culture.
- 1981 Restructuring structuralism. Symposium: *The Future of Structuralism*, Intercongress of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, Amsterdam, April 22-25.
- 1981 Symbolic synergy and glossogenesis. Symposium: *The Transdisciplinary Symposium on Glossogenetics*, UNESCO, Paris, Aug. 24-28.

- 1982 Explorations in the structure and semantics of Upper Paleolithic symbols. *The First International Congress of Human Paleontology*, Nice, France, Oct.16-21.
- 1983 Organizer (with Robert A. Rubinstein) of the symposium series, *Peace and War: Anthropological Perspectives*. International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, Harrison Hot Springs and Vancouver, BC, Canada, Aug. 18-25. Paper presented: Is war necessary?
- 1984a World security: Impediments and options. Address delivered at the San Francisco Bay Area meeting of the Society of Woman Geographers, Jan. 14.
- 1984b Securing Our World. Plenary address delivered at the Triennial Meeting of the Society of Woman Geographers, Washington, D.C., April 28.
- 1984c Organizer (with Lucy Jayne Botscharow) of the symposium, *Symbolism in Lithic Cultures*, 83rd Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Denver, Nov. 15. Paper presented: Iconics and analogy in the Paleolithic.
- 1985a Cross-cultural approaches to the problems of peace and war. Working meeting of the Commission on the Study of Peace, of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Moscow, Aug.19-25.
- 1985b Organizer (with Robert A. Rubinstein) of the symposium, *Power, Change, and Security Decisions: Anthropological Perspectives*. Annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Los Angeles, CA.
- 1986a Anthropology and world peace. *International Seminar on Peace, Development and International Order*, Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, India, Feb.14-16.
- 1986b Iconic abstraction in Prehistoric Language and Signs. 2nd annual meeting of the Language Origins Society, Cambridge University, Cambridge, England, Aug. 29-31.
- 1987a Organizer (with Roger Fisher) of the symposium: *Enhancing Conflict-Coping Skills: Social Science and the U.S. Institute of Peace*. Annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Chicago, IL, Feb. 4-18. Paper contributed: Suggestions from anthropology for improving international understanding.
- 1987b Symbolic origins and transitions in the Paleolithic. Symposium, *The Origins and Dispersal of Modern Humans*, Cambridge University, Cambridge, England, March 22-26.
- 1987c Guest Lecture, Cultural Triggering of Psychological Reversals. 3rd International Conference on Reversal Theory, The Netherlands School of Business, Nijenrode, Holland, June 30-July 3.
- 1987d Image and substance in modern American military policy. Symposium: *Symbolic Theory and Practical Politics: Culture, Ideology and Nuclear Weapons*, Annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Chicago, Nov. 18-22.

- 1988 Peace-promoting ritual reversal. *Symposium: Anthropology of Non-violence and Peace*, organized by Leslie E. Sponsel and Thomas A. Gregor, American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting, Phoenix, AZ, Nov. 16-20.
- 1989a The causes of conflict. World Affairs Council, July 14.
- 1989b Evidence for the evolution of fricatives in a monogenetic model of language origins. 5th annual meeting of the Language Origins Society, University of Texas, Austin, TX, Aug. 10-12.
- 1990 Body Process in the Evolution of Language. Conference: *Giving the Body its Due*. Organized by Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR, Nov. 4-5.
- 1991a The cognitive requisites for language. 7th annual meeting of the Language Origins Society. Northern Illinois University, De Kalb, IL, July 18-20.
- 1991b The evolution of linguistic symbols. Department of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley, Sept. 26.
- 1992a Old World language in the Americas. Symposium in honor of George F. Carter, Annual meeting of the Association of American Geographers, San Diego, CA, April 19-23.
- 1992b Language origins in the Americas. 8th annual meeting of The Language Origins Society, Selwyn College, Cambridge University, Cambridge, England, Sept. 7-10.
- 1992c Linguistic bases of human consciousness. Symposium: *The evolution of consciousness*. Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, San Francisco, CA, Dec. 2.
- 1993 Analogy as Language Prototype. 92nd annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Washington, DC, Nov. 19.

SERVICE ON COMMITTEES AND BOARDS:

- 1977-1983 United States delegate to the Permanent Council of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences.
- 1983-present Board of the Commission on the Study of Peace, International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences.
- 1983-1986 Committee on Science, Arms Control and National Security, American Association for the Advancement of Science.
- 1986-present Board of directors, Ploughshares Fund, San Francisco, CA.
- 1986-1989 Board of directors, Pacific Institute for Studies in Development, Environment and Security, Berkeley, CA.

AWARDS *and honors*

1987 Outstanding Achievement Award, Society of Woman Geographers Triennial meeting, New York, May 16

1990 Elected Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science

1996 Double Symposium Session: Papers in Honor of Mary LeCron Foster, Annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, San Francisco, CA, November 24.

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:

Fellow, American Association for the Advancement of Science

Fellow, American Anthropological Association

Linguistic Society of America

Language Origins Society

International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences

Society of Woman Geographers

International Linguistic Association

Society of Applied Anthropology

Southwestern Anthropological Association

Society for Latin American Anthropology

Remarks at Fosters' Oral History Presentation, by Robert Rubinstein

Let me begin by thanking Suzanne Calpestri for inviting me to take part in this event, Suzanne Riess for her oral history work which creates the occasion for this affair, and of course George and Mickie Foster for recognizing the value of their personal and professional stories, and for their willingness to give these interviews in the first place.

I met Mickie and George only twenty years ago. So, I expect that there are those here who have known them a good bit longer or who have been in more constant daily interaction with them than have I.

I feel like I am addressing a gathering of good friends, any one of whom could speak more eloquently about them. But, Suzanne has asked me to speak briefly about Mickie, from the perspective of a friend, colleague and long-term collaborator. I am very glad to do that.

Rather than making my remarks personal in nature, I want spend the few minutes that have been allocated to me reflecting, ever so briefly, on some of Mickie's professional characteristics and accomplishments as I see these.

Mickie has two abiding areas anthropological concern: The origin and growth and elaboration of the human capacity for symbolism, and the peaceful preservation of the human species. To both of these areas Mickie has made great contributions.

Although they appear to be quite distinct areas of inquiry, she has even at times brought these concerns together in her work.

Mickie's contributions to both areas have been marked by at least the five characteristics: Innovation, Persistence, Organizational Effort, Optimism, and a sense of Self-perspective and Humor.

Innovation. For me, Mickie is foremost an innovative thinker.

In her work on the origin of language Mickie has developed an entirely original approach. In doing so she has developed new theoretical understandings of language origins and she has developed new methods for creating data with which to characterize primordial language.

In her work in peace studies, the area of her work with which I am most familiar, Mickie has been a leader in bringing symbolism back into discussions of the prevention of war.

Her own theoretical work on psychological reversals and the creation of the social conditions for the prevention of war – and especially nuclear war – is also signal in nature.

Persistence. Perhaps what is most striking about Mickie's professional achievements is that they are rooted in a kind of deep-seated commitment to the importance of the work in which she is engaged. This sense of value for her work results in a persistence in pursuit of both her language and peace projects.

Longer than the twenty years that I've known her, Mickie has surrounded

herself with dictionaries and archaeological materials relating to the origins of language and symbolism. She continued her quest for language origins in the face of great skepticism and sometimes a hostile reception from her language colleagues. But, Mickie persisted in her efforts and now has such a carefully worked out – and with Jan Thomas’s help accessible and searchable -- set of materials that I don’t doubt her work on language origins will be seen as foundational in the future.

Like many other anthropologists, Mickie felt that our discipline could make critical contributions to the prevention of nuclear holocaust and to the creation of the conditions for a more peaceful world.

Mickie is one of a very few, however, who took this commitment and translated it into continuing professional action. She pursued this commitment even when anthropologists who did peace studies, were marginalized within the discipline.

That peace studies in anthropology is now viewed as a legitimate and accepted area of investigation is due directly to Mickie’s persistence in her professional and personal efforts to make anthropology relevant.

Organizational Efforts. Mickie has not, however, been the lone scholar cloistered away with her books and data. Indeed, it is a hallmark of her anthropological work that she has seen that the issues that concern her are best pursued within the context of collaboration with other scholars. Mickie has invested much effort in insuring that opportunities for collaboration exist.

Her efforts to understand human symbolism, led to her organizing a Wenner-

Gren Symposium, the proceedings of which were published in a volume Mickie edited with Stanley Brandes, *Symbol as Sense*. As well, Mickie brought together archaeologists and linguists in symposia that sought better understanding of the origins and growth of symbolism. Some of this activity is reflected in her book with Lucy Jayne Botscharow, *The Life of Symbols*.

In the area of the anthropology of peace, Mickie is chiefly responsible for the formation of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, Commission on Peace and Human Rights. The work of that Commission resulted in two books that Mickie and I edited together, *Peace and War: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, and *The Social Dynamics of Peace and Conflict: Culture in International Security*.

But perhaps more importantly, Mickie's organizational efforts also led to numerous symposia at the meetings of the American Anthropological Association, the Society for Applied Anthropology, The American Association for the Advancement of Science, Academy of Science in Moscow, at the Indian Institute of Technology in Kanpur, and elsewhere.

These all helped to "make the anthropological world safe for peace studies."

Optimism. Mickie's professional contributions are marked by a spirit of optimism.

In the face of seemingly insurmountable intellectual odds—as in the case of the study of language origins -- or of professional obstacles -- as in the case of the

establishment of anthropological peace studies, Mickie's professional work always seems to me to reflect a sense of optimism.

A belief that no matter the obstacles she would move inquiry far towards the goals she set, and eventually reach them.

Sense of self-perspective and humor. Mickie's work is always also striking for the sense of self-perspective and humor that it conveys. No matter how weighty the issue she treats – including the possibility of nuclear annihilation – for me Mickie's work always reflects a kind of playfulness and perspective. So, that her anthropological work is both consequential and engaging.

Summing Up. There are many aspects of Mickie's professional life that I have not been able to mention in this brief reflection.

I'd like to end my remarks on a slightly personal note. I've been involved in a large number of collaborative projects. But in none of those have I ever felt that the work in which I was involved was as important as that I've done and continue to do together with Mickie. In none of these have I had collaborators who have had as much energy as Mickie, or who have pushed as hard at the intellectual edges of our work. I am certain that none of those collaborations have ever been so much fun.

I think there is no one better than Mickie Foster at understanding symbols and social action. At keeping the importance of doing so in perspective and in sticking with that work. From this we have all benefited.

Thank you, Mickie.

Countering Offense:
Institutionalized Alternatives to Military Action

Mary LeCron Foster
Department of Anthropology
University of California, Berkeley, CA

Introduction

Institutions arise in response to human needs. Therefore, if we are to find possible alternatives to military action, we need to address the underlying needs that have made military action a culturally institutionalized means of resolving conflict, and to assess whether alternative institutions might meet the same criteria.

Human culture is an institution. It is made up of conventionalized rules and understandings that must be learned by each individual if he or she is to behave in such a way as to be understood by fellow members of his or her society. Communication is a social, behavioral act, whether its avenue is speech, gesture, some other sequence of bodily movements, or the result of such movements, as, for example, writing, or photography. During the Paleolithic, cultural conventions gradually arose to assist in cooperation for survival and life enhancement. This came about because hominids became good mimics, using their bodies in expressive ways, and learned to mimic not only conspecifics, but representatively, by providing symbols to represent relational states

and objects.¹

Culture is structured as a complex of interactive and overlapping sets of patterned symbolic networks. Anthropologists studying particular social groups search for the patterns that underlie distributions of meaningful elements, and work to uncover underlying strands of interdependent meanings. While cultures are socially individual constructs, they share a common prehistory.

As a result of common evolution, some behavioral tendencies are universal. Those most pertinent to a consideration of conflict and its resolution are emotional arousal through fear and suspicion of outsiders, and the need for empowerment and mastery. Human beings learn to master and control their environment by means of observation, instruction, imitation, trial and error--but always within the matrix of their own culture. This matrix provides control over the environment--both human and non-human. The drive for control over nature gives rise to technology. The drive for social control gives rise to social stratification.

Each cultural matrix presents a set of rules assuring social acceptance through conformity. The rules organize experience and are necessary for human social functioning. The major organizing tool is language. Contrary to common belief, language is not just naming, or a set of words to be applied to things and actions, but a complex system held together by a network of analogically based classes and sequential positionings that may be manipulated in ways that gain the speaker control over the hearer. This control is exercised through ordering and selection of words and intonations, through persuasion, reassurance, or even simply through explanation (which also has the goal of persuasion). New tech-

nologies have greatly increased the persuasive power of the word.

Social control may be achieved by verbal means, by example, or by means of force. Force is an alternative which is usually not resorted to unless other attempts at control have failed. Social cohesion, or the satisfying feeling of belonging--of having the support and approbation of one's peers--is also a kind of control.

Anthropological research indicates that for human beings there is very little, perhaps nothing, that is 'real' in the sense of objective fact, untouched by subjective interpretation. Any anthropologist will tell you that reality for human beings is cultural reality. Many psychological tests have also shown conclusively that human beings perceive and interpret events in terms of culturally induced preconceptions.

Another universal human need seems to be the need to innovate. Art and technology are both expressions of this need, as is intellectual discovery. The history of tool use, as revealed through archaeological research, shows slow but ever-accelerating progress in putting the rest of nature to human exploitation. Other animals often use nature in intricate ways: bower birds organize natural materials creatively in order to attract mates, beavers cut trees and dam up waterways to create their habitats, often setting in motion far-reaching ecological changes. Many examples of this kind can be found, but human beings are the only animals that have found the whole world and all of its products to be technological resources. Primates are the chief tinkerers among mammals, given to trying, testing, and, to a certain extent, mimicry. Primate advances in mimicry gave

human beings a great advantage because innovation comes about through exercise of the faculty to perceive and exploit analogies through classification, upon which human culture depends. During the Palaeolithic this faculty became very highly developed in hominids, and by virtue of its possession Homo sapiens achieved overwhelming control over the natural world².

Another expression of the relentless human need to experiment is fantasy. The ability to exploit analogies creatively has enabled human beings to create alternate realities. These begin as individual mental images, projected onto physical matter by any means at hand so that they may be shared. Sharing leads to institutionalization through development of rules of correct usage. Both visual and auditory institutions incorporate such rules: writing, with such categories as books with subcategories of novels; poems with subcategories as sonnet or epic; speaking, with a variety of rhetorical subcategories; imagery such as architectural styles, cinema comedies, or television programming; ritual activities such as church services or religious processions. Technological innovation continues to provide fantasy with an ever-increasing outlet.

Perhaps related to the need to experiment is the need to confront and overcome danger. If no natural challenges of this kind present themselves, they are often sought out or devised. Dangers not created by nature are generated by man. I say 'man' advisedly, because women, unless emulating men, seem by nature to be neither risk-takers nor risk-seekers. This may well be because it is women's nature to risk the dangers of childbirth and to be ready to risk their own lives in order to protect their children

from dangers, so that they may be disinclined to search for other hazards to surmount.

Although wars seem to be man-made, not woman-made, women are often ardent supporters of military action. In every culture men have the role of makers and users of weapons, Killing, for whatever reason, is almost inevitably a role for men, and since masculinity is universally construed as good, warfare tends to share this value and warriors are considered to be the most masculine of men.

A frequent cultural response to the coalescence of all of these needs is war. War provides a heightened emotional climate of shared danger and risk, social cohesiveness through shared loyalties, and if successful, is a quick avenue to control of human and material resources. It also inspires innovation and creativity in devising new strategies and new and superior technologies. War also allows for creation of ritualized alternative realities charged with powerful affect: the imaged Other as Evil Empire, or Satan, and even other entire societies or ethnic groups as inherently evil, as well as a deity or deities supportive of one's own military objectives. There is little wonder that war has been an enduring success as a cultural solution and that ideologies and institutions have arisen to support it.

Warfare is not an accident of nature, like earthquake or hurricane, but a cultural institution, especially dear to 'civilized' people, for whom it has a profound fascination. Human beings do not kill their own kind randomly. Motivation must be strong, for in all cultures killing without culturally sanctioned cause is taboo. War is culturally sanctioned killing, and the killer is

raised to the status of hero. National heroes have almost inevitably been either themselves warriors, or leaders who have brought the country through a successful war.

The military is the most thoroughly stratified of human institutions and the most thoroughly controlled by the upper strata. Military usage also incorporates the most powerful current technological means in the effort to maintain a strategic advantage. In its increasing reliance on machine- rather than man-power, the military has become increasingly depersonalized.

Cultural Reality in Two Modes

I stated above that cultural reality was not literal reality. Physical events and conditions matter, but human reality is equally affected by layers and entanglements of culturally supplied meaning. Assessment of fact is the task of empirical science. Such science is revered because it often can, if proper safeguards are applied, reveal objective reality. However, in the endeavor, science must not overlook variables, and these are not always easy to detect. The goal of logical reasoning is to discover relationships between cause and effect. This goal has been termed 'material'. Material interests are those that involve physical conditions over which we can exercise instrumental control. In contrast, 'ideal', interests relate to the goals themselves, to the culturally desirable, toward which all normal human beings aspire. According to Liipschutz,

Situations also arise in which preferences and outcomes cannot be linked to such measurable goals and in which the logic of action is unclear. In such circumstances, actors may be characterized as

behaving in an 'irrational' or 'nonrational' manner, even though they may be acting out well-formulated programs and schemes. We may call these types of goals 'ideal.' Material and ideal goals are not, of course, entirely disassociated; there is overlap between the two and they may be pursued simultaneously."³

Actually, most situations are of this type, and disputes frequently arise between judgements of rationality. Goals almost invariably share some aspects of each. As Lipschutz goes on to say,

The influence of ideas, themes, and institutions in actor behavior and the formulation of policies has often been given short shrift by political science and other disciplines. This may be due to the fact that such phenomena are difficult to 'observe' or 'measure.' It may be a reflection of the positivist belief that the determinants of behavior can be isolated and analyzed in some absolute sense or as Kal Holsti (1986:643) has written, it may be that academics 'prefer authoritative outcomes...[and], like the policymakers [they] often criticize, are uncomfortable with conceptual or theoretical grey areas.'⁴

Lipschutz recognizes that decisions or actions are often directed or modified by a symbolic framework that is used instrumentally to map out a course of action. These organizing principles both suggest how the world ought to be, and are causal in the sense that they express the processes that must be implemented if the ideal is to be realized. In addition, they are 'the idealized projection of a nation's successful history into and onto the world.'⁵ Causes of war, like the causes of most actions, derive both from the material need for natural resources and the ideas and principles that suggest possible courses of action. Therefore, both materialism and idealism must be taken into account.

Anthropologists have sometimes themselves criticized the tendency to describe only the ideal and to neglect the real in their

ethnographical accounts. This is because informants tend to describe what ought to be rather than its often imperfect realization. It could probably be argued that culture is world view, since culture is not social practice. World view has a strong moral quality in which religious beliefs play a strong part. Because it reverses the norm by sanctioning killing, warfare everywhere moves into the realm of the sacred and is supported by religious tenets.

Every culture offers its members moral guidelines. Those peoples that we may regard as 'savages', in their own cultural terms are abiding by their own moral rules. Such abominations (for us) as cannibalism and head-hunting have had moral sanction in some parts of the world, and have been practiced by seemingly gentle people. Participants are carrying out what they consider to be their moral duty, just as airborne warriors drop bombs in our behalf. There is a difference, though, in the degree of human destruction allowed by the moral sanctioning of killing in the two groups. Warfare, in 'civilized' societies, is now at the point where not just single individuals, but whole towns, cities, or countrysides are targeted for destruction. In contrast, head-hunting wars in Borneo or Papua New Guinea terminate with very few killings or woundings.

In the past, human groups like societies in Borneo or Papua New Guinea were small and relatively isolated, so that morally sanctioned damage to neighbors was relatively slight. Today, interconnections are global, technologies for killing enormously powerful, and ideologies are no longer isolated phenomena primarily affecting only their believers and nearest neighbors.

The dominant military ideology has become globally lethal.

Each ideology is imbibed with the mother's milk, so to speak. It is a rare individual who will question it, and social sanctions of some kind face the person who dares to voice fundamental doubts. Because the shared ideology is a moral imperative for those who live it, opposition to it is reacted to very emotionally and construed as a major threat to the society itself. The universality of such emotional investment suggests the utility of examining the underlying psychological needs that occasion it.

Social Stratification and Equalization

The hierarchization of society perhaps began with the evaluation of males, and men's activities, as superior to females, and the activities of women. Superior male muscular force was probably a major contributing feature. Battles between other mammals pit male against male in a struggle for sexual favors. The dominant male then becomes the leader of the group. Warfare among human males is fought to achieve other kinds of control, but is still performed between men, and the war commander is always a man.

Social status depends upon the social role performed rather than upon individual peculiarities. 'The only relation between its members which is indispensable for the existence of a social stratum is the mutual recognition of equal status. The consciousness of solidarity or antagonism towards other strata may or may not be present'⁶. In other words, status and equality are two sides of the same coin, and it is useless to discuss stratifica-

tion without discussing equalization. The need for control fosters stratification, and the need for acceptance fosters equalization.

In some circumstances, individuals may move up or down the ladder of social stratification. 'Generally speaking, the greater the differences in status the stronger is the tendency for the corresponding patterns of behavior to become institutionalized, which involves a clear demarcation of groups to which they apply. This is particularly likely to happen in societies not undergoing rapid changes',⁷

According to Andreski, struggle is omnipresent in human society, and the common question of why men fight should be turned to try to explain why it is that they do not fight more often.⁸

Bateson⁹, in an ethnographical account of the Iatmul people of New Guinea, introduced the notion of 'schismogenesis', theorizing that periodic schismogenic reversals must take place if social fission (schism) is to be avoided. The reversals take place ritually when hierarchy (complementary relationships) becomes overemphasized, or when social equalization (symmetrical relationships) is overly dominant. At such a point, one type of relationship is ritually replaced by its opposite. Bateson himself does not mention the status inequality in complementary relationships, but it is present in the cases he discusses, and it seems to me self-evident, for if this were not the case, no need for reversal would present itself.

Elsewhere, I have discussed schismogenesis as a factor in promoting warfare¹⁰. Human beings seem to need the experience of strong emotional arousal, and for this reason often actually court

risk¹¹. Exposure to real danger generates fear, and the successful accomplishment of a risky task is an exhilarating experience.

Many sports (e.g. car racing, boxing, hang-gliding) include risk and provide emotional arousal to participants and spectators alike. War is the emotional experience par excellence. War also reverses schismogenesis more effectively than any other method institutionalized to date. Warring parties are coequal (symmetrical) in fighting for control as a status-increasing event. The winning party achieves a hierarchical (complementary) advantage. Forms of struggle are controlled by cultural rules of the game. One set of rules governs warfare and when and how it shall be pursued.

Leach describes a universal division of human time between the sacred and the profane.¹² The latter is the time of everyday activities. Profane periods are universally interrupted by sacred rituals--socially shared time of heightened emotion. Sacred time sanctions breaking the taboos of normal time and emphasizes shared ideals. Warfare is like sacred festivals in being provided with religious justification and emphasizing cultural values. It also sanctions killing--the most important social taboo. According to Leach's criteria, it seems to qualify as sacred time.

These culturally universal phenomena perhaps serve to answer Andreski's question as to why men fight as little as they do, as well as why culturally sanctioned fighting exists and is perpetuated.

After World War II, fear of nuclear disaster became a global fear. Unlike the fear generated by risk-taking, this fear created an unprecedented malaise because no one, and no government, could

figure a way out of the nuclear impasse. Some in the United States, including many in the administration, came to believe that fear of the effect of nuclear disaster was adaptive, and ensured that the event would never take place.¹³ During the Cold War this proved to be the case, so to some extent it seemed a rational belief, but it assumed too much of human nature and the possibility of accident or misunderstandings. This was borne out by the Cuban missile crisis, in which a nuclear war was very narrowly averted.¹⁴

Many culturally institutionalized activities serve as status equalizers, as well as providing opportunities for control. Partnerships between individuals and between groups level out status differences and themselves provide social control through cooperation rather than rivalry. Exchanges of whatever kind require group amity rather than animosity, but even while they promote equality they also promote competition for advantage. At the very least, a partner in an exchange is struggling to maintain his equality, and at most is trying to put the other partner at a disadvantage by exchanging something of still greater value. Starting with Mauss¹⁵, exchanges of all kinds have been discussed at length in the anthropological literature.

As equalizers, it seems to me that intergroup exchanges have far greater value than is indicated by the act of exchange, or the competition for advantage in exchange, would suggest. The value lies in extending the cultural field of those involved in the exchange. Through the exchange they must come into contact with those who are, to a greater or lesser degree 'The Other' --those with differing cultural institutions and belief systems. The more

interaction one has with those with another world view, the less alien they seem. Simply through the exchange--of whatever kind--the exchangers can become allies rather than adversaries.

Wars of conquest have, throughout history, served to unify disparate groups under a single jurisdiction, providing structure for pacific coexistence. Europe was once an area of small feudal fiefdoms in a constant state of conflict. While religious difference has often sparked conflict, religion has also provided common beliefs and ritual practices that have aided political consolidation. While war is divisive and is waged to raise the status of one society over another, internally it enforces cooperation and fosters cohesiveness and shared loyalty in the face of mutual danger. It also inspires innovation and creativity in devising new strategies and new and superior technologies.

But we need to rethink the role of war. Technological advances have changed military practices in such a way that the destructiveness of any war threatens the safety and welfare of the entire globe. While nuclear weaponry has been considered the greatest danger, even without nuclear warheads conventional weapons and their powerful delivery systems allow instigators of war to reap terrible destruction at very long distances and to direct it toward populations that have had no part in the altercations that have disrupted the peace.

Cultural norms can be affected by determined individuals and groups of individuals even though culture often seems to have its own self-generating power and flow. In a fairly short time western nations have come to view both race and gender in new ways. When ideas and entrenched beliefs begin to change, progress be-

comes quite rapid. We need to take deep stock of our addiction to war as political solution and to seek for more productive and emotionally gratifying alternatives.

Schismogenesis and the Cold War

During the Cold War, schismogenesis came very close to causing global disaster. The build-up of tension was horizontal, or symmetrical, rather than vertical, or complementary. Efforts to negotiate arms control between the two adversarial polities simply exacerbated the arms race as each tried to find loopholes in the treaties in order to secure some advantage. Nuclear war or nuclear accident seemed bound to be the outcome. Each side was afraid to stop the competition, just as each side was afraid of the holocaust that would ensue if it were not stopped.

Somehow, miraculously, Gorbachev found the way out. Although I doubt that he was aware of the structural formula for resolving conflict in myth, enunciated by Lévi-Strauss¹⁶, he used precisely that method. The US and the USSR. were at a standoff in terms of mutual destructive capacity. The US had the advantage in economic superiority and in terms of global support, based on its democratic government and market economy. Resolution, in the mythic formula depends upon transfer of the function of the super-ordinate adversary to the subordinate adversary, with a reversal, or readjustment of its meaning. To resolve the nuclear standoff, Gorbachev adopted principles promoting democracy, perestroika, 'restructuring' and glasnost, 'openness', declaring them important to the future of socialism, and rejected nuclear technology,

destructive to the global environment, in favor of environmental stewardship and protection. Such a reversal was totally unexpected. Democracy, rephrased not as a rejection of socialist principles but as a totally revitalized socialism with a new goal, fulfilled the 'mythic' prediction. His stock rose both in the East and the West, and the USSR ceased to be the 'Evil Empire.'

According to the Soviet economist, Belchuk, Soviet society was in urgent need of deep changes, and Gorbachev came in on the crest of this wave.¹⁷ He discusses at some length the meaning of democratic restructuring within the Soviet System, differentiating it from its meaning in the West. He also is at pains to differentiate 'profit and loss' accounting as the new Soviet economic strategy, from 'market economy'. He points out that the new struggle against dogmatism, with the ideology of aggressive messianism does not require a revision of the entire Marxist philosophy of history with its historical determinism. This is consistent with the mythic formula, in which the successful transformation adopts only part of what was once practiced by the adversary, applying it in new ways.

This was the most extraordinary and innovative alternative to the nuclear dilemma that could have been devised. That its structure is that of mythical transformation confirms mythology as the wisdom of the ideal.

Cohesiveness, Diversity, and Divisiveness

For societies to function, members must have common ground to pursue a joint destiny. Families are usually the most cohesive

groups, with kin developing trust because of close interaction and the need for cooperation. As contacts between individuals widen, confidence wanes. To overcome lessening of social unity a number of cultural mechanisms have developed. People and objects are classed together so that they may be dealt with similarly by all. Belief systems are based on acceptance of class stereotypes. Eventualities are given stereotypic ritual expression or definition which makes them easier to comprehend and cope with. Cohesiveness is maintained by commonalities of interpretation.

Where societies are small and isolated there is little need for formal administrative organization and internal social disruption is minimized. Neighboring societies tend to view each other with suspicion, their differing ways of doing things are criticized as inferior, and disputes easily arise between them. If power has accrued to one group at the expense of another, and has been maintained in such a way that the subordinate group does not pose a threat, the dominant group tends to denigrate the subordinate group in relatively benign and paternalistic ways, as 'childlike', 'happy-go-lucky', 'irresponsible', and in need of guidance, much as animals that are looked upon with favor.¹⁸

This was the case until recently with respect to blacks in the United States. Although racism is increasingly looked upon with disfavor, blacks are now often considered to be aggressive and dangerous rather than jolly and lovable. This is in accordance with Royce's judgement that the benign attitudes are only applied to inferiors who are regarded as harmless. When they are differently perceived, they are termed 'cunning,' 'treacherous,' and 'deceitful.'

Societies that are the least diverse are the least internally divisive. Primitive societies studied by anthropologists tend to have customs and belief systems shared by all. While conflicts can and do arise, customary ways of settling them are present. While social hierarchy may exist, it is lacking in complexity. Roles are relatively undifferentiated except for those dictated by gender or age. Elders are leaders, and particular elders are given greater respect because of their decisive personalities or perceived wisdom. Today, such societies are limited to remote and isolated corners of the world, separated from neighbors by geographical barriers.

The people most often characterized by anthropologists as non-violent are the Semai of Malaysia. They live in rugged, mountainous terrain, undesirable to the dominant Malays. They are considered by the latter to be timid, and their self-claim is that they 'never get angry'. They are uneasy about killing animals and murder is almost unthinkable. Children are expected to conform to the non-violent image, and while they may be threatened they are never struck. Absence of punishment gives the children no violent model to emulate. No one--not even parents toward children--voluntarily assumes authority. Elders are respected but have no authority to enforce their decisions. Public opinion takes the place of authority, and if a Semai can influence it enough, he may get things done. Influential Semai are good public speakers. Generosity brings popularity, so that a generous person is apt to have influence, but no one must seem to seek power over others¹⁹.

Suspicion of diversity has a long history and is not easily overcome. It is illustrated by recent global proliferation of local wars between ethnic groups sharing no overarching belief system or goals. The United States is a historical laboratory for study of this phenomenon. Ethnic diversity was long downplayed by the ideal of the 'melting pot,' and has since surfaced, inspired by the renewed, or restated, ideal of social equality. Meanwhile, suspicion of religious differences has greatly diminished, where it has increased in many other parts of the world.

Change

In recent years, the status of minority groups such as blacks in the United States has begun a slow shift upward, where for many years in the past, their subordination went completely unquestioned. Women and other subordinated groups are also seeking what Andreski calls 'interstratic mobility'.²⁰ This activity is accompanied by a gradual shift in world view toward an equalization of opportunity regardless of race or gender.

Gaining control is an important factor in inducing change, for the goal of controlling implies a desire for change in the direction of self-interest. In any non-forceful interchange something is given up in return for something gained. Even when force is used, trade-offs are often made: for example, subject people may pay tribute to, or work for, the master group, but in return are granted patronage and protection.

An extreme and unprecedented case of this was the relationship between the United States and former enemies Germany and

Japan after the second World War. Much money and effort was expended to build up the depleted economies of both, and they prospered more than the victorious countries that had been their foes. This seems to have been inspired by the lessons of the aftermath of WWI, when perpetuation of inequalities between former enemies became a major cause of WWII. Thus, immediate advantage can sometimes be replaced by anticipated future benefit.

Where gains from such trade-offs come to seem insufficient, subject peoples are apt to rebel against relinquishment of control and to struggle for redress. If control is handled wisely, and other needs are satisfied, trade-offs will compensate for lack of total control, and both contenders can satisfy themselves with the degree of control that they have achieved. In acknowledging the control of any government, the individual must relinquish some measure of personal control--trading it for greater security.

Anthropologists who have studied social change, or who have been involved in programs attempting to bring about change in target populations, are well aware that planned change is not easy to achieve. It can scarcely be accomplished unless the incentive comes from within the population rather than from without. The advantage to changing must be very apparent to the people involved, and the goal of change must find an ideological fit with traditional goals in such a way as to enhance rather than to destroy them. If change is induced under force, or the threat of force, the existing ideology is either destroyed or severely damaged, with ensuing disorientation and demoralization as the target population struggles to internalize or accommodate an alien ideology.

I have found that Ardener's concept of 'p-structure',²¹ (1980) elucidates the process of change. The 'p' in 'p-structure' is adapted from the linguistic concept of the paradigmatic aspect of language. Paradigms are classes, members of which enter into specifiable structural relationships. Members of the class are concrete, while the p-structure serves the structured event only as a structuring tendency, or template for action. The resultant action is a new 's-structure' ('s' for 'syntagmatic') responsive to changed cultural circumstances. P-structures only prefigure s-structures, while the latter actually occur. Culture is made up of p-structures, while s-structures are social facts. It is only in this sense that culture is 'superorganic'. Culture is only manifested in its representations, which are social facts, so can only be analyzed inductively.

Change doesn't take place in a vacuum. It responds to various social and economic pressures, but its responses are shaped in accordance with the models provided by the nature of conventionalized responses, similar in structure to one another because of cultural p-structures shared in the minds of social actors.

In my view, what Ardener has called p-structures are metaphoric templates because new meaning-bearing structures are constructed in accordance with likeness to preexisting, conventionally modelled structures. What this means is that structures are never completely new. They are developed because of some relational resemblances to structures already experienced as templates because of similarities between culturally apprehended events. Because of the semantic agreement, or metaphoric

relationship of elements of structures forming a semantic unit, I have called them 'concordant structures.'²² I illustrated this argument with formal structural features relating marriage ceremonies in a Mexican village, Tzintzuntzan, to baptismal ceremonies as covert metaphors for procreational interchange.

The metaphoric structure of procreational concordance can also be related to ritual interchanges between adjoining communities during the major annual fiesta, indicating that the conceptual model for social unification and harmony is metaphorically inspired by the social unification between marriage partners, which includes bonding of the two sets of parents in the relationship of compadrazgo, or joint parenting. These bonds are cemented through elaborate ritual exchanges of special foods, cigarettes, alcoholic beverages, and formal embraces accompanied by standardized speech routines.

Ritual bonding, implying mutual interests and goals, can play an effective role in avoiding clashes over conflicting interests. While often no substantive results stem from 'summit meetings' between United States' presidents and Russian leaders, the unifying effects of ritual bonding persist.

Lévi-Strauss' mythic analyses²³ have viewed structures of folk narratives as organized and realized as concordance cemented by underlying semantic relationships. He analyzes them as transformations of one another, without considering their origins. It seems probable that the semantics of all mythic and ritual relationships had as point of departure, interpretations of basic physical relationships metaphorically transposed from one situation to another.

All three theoretical positions refer to semantic relationships as culturally determined structural principles transferable from one domain to another in accordance with differing circumstances. The flow of events affects the choice of appropriate semantic fillers. Unless cultural continuity is totally disrupted, events will be responded to in accordance with established templates. These will change very gradually in accordance with new interpretations. If new concordances are introduced from outside because of contact, including conquest, some congruence between the new and the old will be attempted, altering but not obliterating the underlying p-structure.

War has been conceived and regulated by different societies in terms of a variety of military templates, but all have similar features. All have the goal of resolving conflict in favor of hierarchical dominance of one side or the other. Warfare universally arouses the same sets of emotions and satisfies the same sets of needs. However, at the present stage of human history the military technologies have become so powerful that war can no longer be assumed to be adaptive. Its destructive potential has outstripped any past utility. Alternatives to war need to be predicated both on satisfaction of the human needs that it addresses, and on forging structures that will allow change to take place.

Dynamic Peace

Alternatives to military action are far more difficult to achieve than is military action itself. Military action is very specifically institutionalized. Alternatives are much more dif-

fuse and depend upon calculated shifts of strategy, bringing about readjustments in world view (i.e. p-structure). Today's nations use military action, or threat of such action, as a means of international control. Other means of control are far less well supported or felt to be much less effective. Until we are willing to reinforce them and accord them the same reliance and support as we do the military, they are not apt to achieve the objective of making military solutions obsolete, however much we may think that we desire it.

War is the most dynamic of all institutionalized events. Since it is so widespread, it must satisfy a basic human need. Since it has developed technologies that make it globally lethal, if the world is to remain habitable it would seem to have outlived its usefulness. If it is to be successfully outmoded, it must be replaced by an institution or institutions that gratify the same human needs. I doubt that killing itself is such a need. Human populations can live very contendedly for generations without mutual slaughter. Controversy is inevitable, but can be settled by other means. Every society has devised both conventionalized ways of settling controversy, and means for keeping controversy within bounds.

To keep societies pacific, either some outlet must be provided for individual and group frustrations, or the subordinate segment of the population must be kept in a state of fear of the use of force. A peaceful solution based on fear can neither be stable nor dynamic.

Society is only truly secure if its members have freedom to choose and plan their own lives in a socially responsible way.

Freedom should not mean just individual freedom, but freedom for society at large. Individual freedom must necessarily be responsive to, and restricted by, attention to wider freedoms. No individual, no social group, and no nation should be free to ignore impediments to the freedom of other individuals, groups, or nations. Diversity of beliefs, life-ways, roles and choices should be encouraged as the only way that a dynamic peace can be achieved. Dynamic peace should provide space for creativity and diversity of all kinds as long as it is not at the expense of the creativity, diversity, and the environment, of others.

There are no quick fixes as alternatives to war. The only truly adaptive alternative must be construction of a global society that values and promotes diversity, creativity, and environmental protection, while guaranteeing freedom from want, and providing maximum opportunity for self realization. As we work toward that end, attempting to provide for the satisfaction of the human needs answered by war, our only interim alternative may be to rely on the mysterious mythical power of the human mind to provide us with surprising breakthroughs such as that devised by Gorbachev.

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from The Life of Symbols, edited by
Mary LeCron Foster and Lucy Jayne
Botscharow, 1990.

Introduction

Mary LeCron Foster

It has become increasingly apparent to many, if not most, cultural anthropologists that culture is a symbol system. That is, culture is a construct of all of the interpretations regarding the nature of the world shared by a social group. These interpretations are represented in concrete ways that are manipulated for individual or group reasons by the group members. These concrete representations are the symbols by which that culture is activated and is communicated to members of the society. Without such a set of shared symbols no human society could function.

Anthropology is the study of culture, and as such it is the study of otherness. The anthropologist lives the symbols of his or her own culture, and by studying others he or she learns to recognize, and, at least to some extent, to manipulate, the symbols of that culture in place of his or her own. The anthropologist involved with more than one other culture soon learns that some people are more “other” than others. The contrasts between the behavior of people belonging to such a culture and that of the anthropologist are great. That culture then seems to the anthropologist—and to those who read anthropological writings—exotic. If the anthropologist is from a Western culture—and most are—and writes from that perspective, then degrees of cultural difference may be seen as a series of concentric rings of otherness, with Western culture at the center of the rings.

Of all anthropologists, archaeologists studying culture from a very great time depth study at the same time the outermost rings of otherness. The greater the time depth, the greater the distance from the center of the circle, and the greater the contrast. Ultimately the threshold or juncture is reached at which differences seem to outweigh similarities and where the validity of comparisons, not only with historic Western peoples, but with modern humans seems dubious. This is the juncture between anatomically modern *Homo sapiens* and morphologically different

types of hominids. There is controversy concerning the status of hominids which lie beyond this threshold, and the humanity of early hominids is still in question. On the other hand, there is general agreement that hominids which are anatomically similar to modern humans are psychologically similar as well, and that they are potentially accessible to us through the application of analogies with historic peoples.

There can be no doubt that the anatomically modern people of the Upper Paleolithic (c. 35,000 to 10,000 B.P.) were symbol-using, culture-bearing beings. As societies of hunter-gatherers these peoples can be compared analogically with present-day, or historically reported, hunter-gatherers, although this is not without its dangers. One paper in this volume which makes such comparisons (T. Kehoe) is cautious in this regard and the method results in some innovative hypotheses. Another (Velo and A. Kehoe), discussing a controversial topic in the archaeology of early symbolism, stresses the dangers of over-comparison, indicating where comparison can probably be safely used and where it may go astray.

With regard to human types preceding the Upper Paleolithic, there is no general agreement as to their mastery of symbols. Were earlier hominids psychologically similar to modern man or were there significant differences between them? At what point did early man become fully human? These questions are important, since they relate both to the theoretical perspective of the investigator and to the methodology that he or she uses. If the group under question is seen as being fundamentally similar to modern *Homo sapiens*, then analogies with modern man can be utilized as a way of shedding light upon these early beings. If there are fundamental differences, then analogies from the human sciences are not in order, and analogies from the natural sciences are more appropriate. As the great apes are genetically the closest creatures to humans, comparison with these animals is often made, and since phylogeny and ontogeny are assumed to be in some way similar, comparisons to the behavior of human infants at various stages of development are often made in order to make sense of the transition. Borchert and Zihlman provide insights into symbolic origins by careful comparison of data from psychological studies of human infants and studies of primate behavior. Botscharow fruitfully compares the semiotic tropologies of culture with early foreshadowing of symbolism and extracts from material culture evidence of significant cognitive shifts in the productive strategies of *Homo erectus*.

The understanding of otherness is always difficult, and ethnocentrism is always a danger. Culture provides us with the lenses through which we perceive the world and without which we cannot see. Yet these lenses inevitably distort our vision of other cultures, and the greater the cultural

differences, the greater the possibility of distortion. The study of pre-historic society is perhaps most susceptible to such pitfalls, since, in addition to cultural distance, there is so much that must be inferred and so little that can be inferred with certainty.

Consciousness of these pitfalls inevitably leads to caution regarding conclusions about archaeological materials. The archaeological literature has been exceedingly cautious in the past quarter of a century. Such caution is in part a reaction to the excesses of earlier archaeologists and in part to the nature of archaeological data. Archaeologists justly point to the fantasies of some early archeological writings as examples of the pitfalls lying in wait for the archaeologist who tries to infer conceptual thought from archaeological data. As a result, the belief has developed that conclusions regarding praxis are much less susceptible to error than conclusions regarding symbolism. The reaction away from speculation in favor of positivist empiricism was a necessary step if the field of archaeology was to progress, and this rigorous approach has served the field well for some time.

In any human science, there is a persistent tension between praxis and symbol, action and meaning, behavior and thought. While it is true that the dialectical relationship between these oppositions should be included in any study of human phenomena, in practice this is extraordinarily difficult. As a result, practitioners of the human sciences tend to concentrate on one or the other. For the past twenty-five years positivism has been dominant in the human sciences, and most particularly in archeology. That this has been so is not surprising. Archaeologists labor under difficult circumstances, inasmuch as they are necessarily limited to the material traces of defunct cultures. It is difficult enough to cull systematic praxis from such remains, and many archaeologists have often maintained that to go any further is merely sloppy speculation.

Unfortunately, positivism's definition of what constitutes knowledge is too narrow. If we now know a good deal more about praxis, we know little more about the symbolism of past cultures than we knew when fantasy was discarded. Every scientific paradigm creates unsolved problems. No paradigm can account for all phenomena. Ultimately, all the possible kinds of solution which a paradigm can yield are identified, and the kinds of solution it cannot give become increasingly clear. New paradigms then arise.

The advance of symbolism as an appropriate anthropological focus requires exploration of a new archaeological paradigm. Symbolism in contemporary and historical ethnological perspective is increasingly well understood, and, as a result, there is a growing realization that symbolism *is* praxis. Human behavior is seen to be marked by the constitution and manipulation of symbols, with the result that a symbol inevitably represents

a certain kind of behavior and an associated way of thinking. Symbols are seen to be the physical manifestations of thought processes. They cannot be read in isolation, but if their interconnections are established, and cross-cultural comparison of these is made, great progress in decipherment can be effected.

Application of cross-cultural analogies between anatomically modern humans separated in either time or space is sometimes also hazardous, but safeguards can be taken. The principal safeguard is the fact of symbolic networks—the association between symbols in a symbolic construct. Szyrkiewicz gives evidence of such networks in extracting social regularities from the material data of a variety of methods of corpse disposal.

The random, historically unrelated occurrence of any specific construct of symbols is highly unlikely, especially if the linkages are multiple and if they can be shown to occur in a similar way in a variety of cultures separated by space and time. However, in an examination of methods of corpse disposal, Szyrkiewicz demonstrates that *general types* of social organization and belief systems can affect social process in predictably similar ways even when no contact between groups seems likely. In contrast, Hall shows that semantically more specific symbolic linkages must reflect remote contact, even when groups exhibiting these linkages are widely separated temporally and geographically.

Strong similarities across cultures, not just between single symbols, but between multiple symbolic constructs, can indicate one of two things: either a psychic unity of humankind or descent from a common prototype. If the symbolic linkages proposed by Szyrkiewicz are found to hold cross-culturally, it is evidence of a kind of psychic unity. However it is extremely unlikely that symbolic networks such as that discussed by Hall are of this kind. Psychic unity provides a matrix for the symbolic process to take place but does not dictate the content of specific symbols nor of symbolic constructs. However, since biological evidence demonstrates that all of humankind has common ancestry, we may also assume a common matrix of cultural forms which has changed over time and differently from place to place but may still be partially discerned and common origin predicted. What is needed are detailed accounts of the structural manifestations of particular systems. Winn's data on Neolithic abstract signs point the way to the kind of analysis of prehistoric graphic continuity that Foster is suggesting.

The papers in this book that deal with change also make the point, either directly or indirectly, that cultural evolution is incremental rather than abrupt. Borchert and Zihlman are concerned to point out that behavior *precedes* anatomical change and that anatomical, including genetic, change results from shifts in behavior rather than from random genetic

mutation. Changes follow a logical progression and depend heavily upon environmental, including social, conditions. Pontius provides evidence of the influence that culture change and learning of new techniques can have on human perception and, ultimately, its biological substrate.

Symbolism as a complex network of interconnected meanings and related actions that govern behavior provides both constraints on change and a guiding matrix allowing for change. The life of symbols shows both stability and transformation. Changes in symbol systems over time are constrained by symbolic interconnections; for no symbol exists in isolation and no symbol has a single referent. We know from modern ethnological studies that symbols are multi-valent and interconnected by means of complex metaphoric and metonymic networks. The totality of such a network constitutes a culture. Over time the meaning of a given symbol changes. Change is usually very subtle, and is characterized often by an almost unnoticed shift in meaning. Gimbutas points out both continuities and shifts in focus over time in the symbolism of Upper Paleolithic and Neolithic eras, and both change and stability with the advent of the Bronze Age.

Creation of a new symbol is not random. New symbols partake of many of the network associations of the old. Thus, the life of symbols may be traced over time, and many symbols are extremely persistent, although their semantics and their interconnecting network must be readjusted in some degree in order to be compatible with changed circumstances. This volume represents an effort to establish some of these persistent strands and changes in the structure of the strands over time by means of structural comparison.

A *structural comparative* approach can usefully draw on the methodology established for language comparison in the nineteenth century and refined since. It has often been cited as a breakthrough in establishing linguistics as the first "true" science among the social sciences. Twentieth century structural linguistics and generative grammar (also reliant on structural relationships between words and parts of words) have strengthened the scientific nature of linguistic methodology. Foster draws on this linguistic methodology in tracing language origins and change. Psycholinguists have led the way into increased understanding of the structure of meaning and the acquisition of such structure. Borchert and Zihlman draw on these advances in pointing out ontogenetic/phylogenetic parallels.

Because the interconnection of symbols acts as a constraint on change, new symbols must be accommodated to the network possibilities of the old. Metaphoric and metonymic paths are preserved or readjusted to accommodate the new. Many symbolic constructs are fairly easily traced through time both because they have been preserved into the present and because records are available of their usage in the past—either

historical or archaeological. What is not preserved historically can often be retrieved in the archaeological record and interpreted because of its similarity to known historical or present-day symbolism. This is not to say that the meaning is identical, but only that a significant thread of meaning has persisted over time such that the symbolism is recognizable. Borchert and Zihlman argue against genetic mutations as the cause of biological change and in favor of social invention as the stimulus for genetic innovation. The logical progression of symbolic reorganization discussed in the other chapters in the book supports this position.

Since there is no consensus as to the dividing point between the cultural concentric circles of humanity and the wider spheres of the natural world, nor as to how to interpret this rubicon, scholars often arrive at quite different interpretations of the same material. Botscharow discusses the difficulties of using a purely referential approach in interpretation of archaeological materials, and instead argues for the relational (i.e. structural) approach of semiotics in an attempt to discover possible early tropes—the hallmarks of symbolism—that motivated the manufacture of certain Acheulean artifacts. By the same token, Szykiewicz isolates persistent structures that have governed corpse disposal—one of the earliest known symbol systems—over time. Foster's two chapters are further illustrations of the potential use of structural comparison across space and time in an effort to understand symbolic origins and change in systems of spoken language and writing.

Two contrasting methods of interpretation inform a great deal of anthropological work on the discovery of meaning in culture. Although these differences in methodological approach are not totally applicable to all of the papers in this volume, they provide theoretical frameworks for much of the analysis. The two approaches have often been called "materialist" versus "idealist," or "positivist" versus "symbolic." The term "idealist" seems somewhat pejorative in divorcing the symbolic interpretation from the reality in which symbols are enacted, suggesting that the symbols themselves are "all in the mind." For us, the term "symbolic" cannot be divorced from the external reality implied by positivism, since the symbols themselves *are* that reality. Thus, we suggest that more accurate terms for theoretical focus might be *survivalist* versus *transcendent*.

Survivalist interpretations relate the appearance of cultural manifestations ("symbols," in our definition of the world) to techniques of survival: strategies for the achievement of economic and genetic advantage. Sociobiological interpretations are prime examples of this approach. Such interpretations make little or no effort to probe behind economic or sexual strategies for other kinds of meaning or motivation. In this volume, Borchert and Zihlman, in fact, explicitly reject sociobiology as a useful

model and turn instead to a comparative structural analysis of the communicative strategies of children and lower primates in order to develop hypotheses about the origins of language and other symbolisms.

The term "structuralist" might also be appropriately applied to what I have called "transcendent" methodology, for, to be effective, transcendent methodology must rely heavily on structure; but structuralism has become so closely associated with the (often poorly understood) work of Lévi-Strauss that it has lost for many some of its original meaning. In the view of transcendent methodologists, while survivalist interpretations provide many valuable insights, they too often beg the question of the semantic resonance of symbolism—resonance that is the chief characteristic of culture. Thus, much survivalist methodology avoids any deep analysis of "culture," a concept that has long been the central focus of anthropology and is much in need of revitalization by transcendent, structuralist analysis.

In order to be convincing, transcendent methodology must base its search for deeper meanings on the analysis of such structural relationships as recur across time or space. Several of the papers in this volume are representative of a transcendent approach. Such an approach makes heavy use of analogic abstraction and often seems abstruse or bordering on fantasy to those who do not understand, or agree with, the methodological prerequisites for this kind of analysis. It is important to make clear the methodological premises on which it relies. The papers of Botscharow, Hall, Foster, and Gimbutas can all be characterized as transcendent, while those of T. Kehoe, and Velo and A. Kehoe are most clearly survivalist in nature.

Winn is meticulously structural, in the best sense of the term, but does not yet venture interpretation of the structures that he has painstakingly uncovered, although he suggests that this is a task for the future. Prudhommeau similarly discovers previously undetected structure in Paleolithic materials and uses it to convincingly postulate a sophisticated approach to the depiction of motion in the work of late Upper Paleolithic artists. However, her interpretation is not precisely transcendent, because, like Winn, she does not attempt to discover symbolic meaning in the paintings beyond that of simple reference.

Several papers in this volume are biologically oriented but in very different ways. Pontius finds resemblances between graphic depictions across time and space, and correlations for these with both physical (neurological) and cultural-environmental conditioning. In hypothesizing phylogenetic cultural development from a combined analysis of ape behavior and the ontogenetic development of human infants within the context of social interaction, Borchert and Zihlman, too, incorporate biological data. Sheets-Johnstone also draws on the biology of mammalian

species in demonstrating how this differential affects perception, and influences interpretation of space and space-based symbolisms by early humans.

Whatever the favored method of interpretation of symbolic origins and development, all of the papers in this volume further symbolic research by suggesting both novel ways of dealing with the data and fresh methods of interpretation that open many new avenues of investigation. They analyze past and enduring symbols and hypothesize their meanings in terms of the environment in which they occur. They recognize that interpretation depends both upon semantic continuity and upon the associational network within which any given symbol is found. In this, all of the papers may be characterized as *structural* in the best sense of the term.

It is patently impossible for any meaning to be extracted from symbols active in the past unless some continuity with the present is assumed. Fortunately such continuity does, in fact, exist, and will yield to patient analysis. The varied approaches in this volume are testimonies to the degree to which the remote past can be interpreted through application of methodological ingenuity and structural principles. Each new approach provides a matrix for further theoretical advances in comparative symbolism.

**Language Origins Research:
A Brief Review of Methodology and Findings**
Dr. Mary LeCron Foster, interviewed by Jan Thomas
January 5, 2001

JAN THOMAS: Here is my understanding of the project we worked on together, in a nutshell:

Essentially, we established a dictionary of primordial language. We did this by finding similar root sounds that associated with similar nuggets of meaning, in languages that spanned the world and represented all language families. This suggests strongly that language was first established in a central location (Africa) before humans spread out and populated the earth.

You have explained to me that historically, in order to show similarities between languages, researchers had tended to look for whole words. What I observed you doing was to look for the root of the word and its associated meaning. For example, if a word that meant “tree” had a certain sound in one language as its root sound, you looked systematically at the other core languages. You usually found a related word with the same beginning sound that meant “tree” or something similar. It wasn’t always a literal translation in meaning, but a relatedness of meaning was evident across all the languages.

Can you summarize how you embarked on your study of language origins?

MARY LeCRON FOSTER: In the beginning I could see certain correlations that made it appear that different languages were somehow related. I started with American Indian languages because that’s my field. I had written two grammars of American Indian languages that had not been analyzed previously.

Linguistics is one of the four fields of anthropology. It used to be that everybody who went into the field to study unknown people focused on languages. They looked at language seriously. Even if they didn’t make a complete study, they were interested in the relationship between language and other aspects of the culture.

After all, everything in a culture goes through language. We have to be able to put things into words to exchange ideas. Language gave us a huge advantage, because we could specify things and talk about what happened yesterday and what might happen next year, which other animals can’t do at all.

All animals communicate in some way, such as dogs sniffing or being able to

urinate and pass on some kind of signal. But human beings somehow stumbled on a highly efficient system. That system had to start somewhere. In the course of my research I discovered that it came out of biological means that can be worked out and built up to. It arose out of animal behavior. This is an obscure point – the rubicon that people think can never be solved.

JT: You are talking now about the animal origins for the shapes of the mouth, shapes that were used to form the very earliest sounds that became the foundation of languages. One of your key findings was the discovery of a relationship between units of meaning and the physiological, gestural shaping of the mouth. You deduce that the mouth was used to create gestural meaning, through expressions and shaping of the mouth, that were a far more contained, precise, and convenient way of communicating than making gestures with the hands and arms. When meaning was conveyed by mouth gestures, this freed the arms and hands to carry out other essential functions. As I recall, you have written several articles that explore this in greater detail.

So, to summarize, the mouth was used to shape mini-gestures that formed units of meaning. Ultimately, these shapes combined with vocalized sounds to produce the units of meaning that became language. Is this a fair nutshell?

MLF: Yes, that's good.

JT: Getting back to the methodology of your research: we worked primarily with ten basic languages that you established as your core languages. Can you explain how you came to investigate those particular languages?

MLF: Looking at different languages, I started with American Indian languages in Latin America, and I saw lots of resemblances that I thought had to be due to something besides borrowing from other languages.

JT: You're talking about resemblances within the American Indian languages?

MLF: Yes, of which there are many. America is probably the richest place in the world for languages. There are so many you can't believe it – particularly in South America.

In any event, linguists had been working for years to sort out the relationships between languages in different parts of the world: Africa, South America, North America. How did language get from the Old World to the New World? Obviously culture started in the Old World. Archeologists can demonstrate that there weren't human beings in the Americas until much later.

It was difficult to sort out how languages were established in the New World,

because America is separated from other languages by two oceans. The closest point linking Old World and New World languages is the Bering Straits, which used to be unbroken so that people could get across and move to the new world. At what point that happened is still up for grabs, because archeologists are continually discovering new traces of human beings in different parts of the New World. The interesting thing is that it spread all through, down to the tip of South America.

Languages that are geographically close together are obviously more likely to be related than languages that are geographically very far apart. For example, most Indo-European languages are found close together, in Europe. (However, India's Sanskrit, which is the most ancient written language, is also an Indo-European language.)

The only way we can find out these things is through writing systems. Without writing systems, I could never have done what I've done.

JT: So you investigated the languages that you did based on considerations of geography? Weren't you also choosing from different language stocks?

MLF: At first I thought I was working on interrelationships only between American Indian languages. Then I began to see resemblances between languages in Asia and Europe (outside of, Indo-European languages) and South American languages, which are very far from the Bering Straits. It's hard to account for those similarities.

When I began finding those similarities beyond the languages of the Americas, it was initially problematic. People can accept the idea of relatedness between languages that were geographically close together, but the minute that you postulate that something far away is related to something nearby, people assume it's accidental.

In order to investigate how language changed over time, you have to show regularities of sound change. This was the big triumph of the 1840s, when Sanskrit was discovered to be related to Latin and Greek – languages that were from places very far from India. It was a big jump. This gave everybody pause. They began analyzing the situation to see what was going on. They came to the conclusion that sound change was regular. For example, if a P changed to F, in English, it always should change to F. So you couldn't say it was B, no matter how similar it was. If you had established a relationship between P and F, it always had to hold.

Regularity was the rock on which comparative linguistics was founded. It gave you something to hold on to. You kept looking, and if you thought you had found a regularity, you kept testing it with other languages. If it kept on being regular, then you could establish it as a p, let's say.

JT: So that's how you investigated the sounds in the specific languages. You found

ways that something changed regularly, that had a certain meaning, and then you could identify that it was a certain primordial unit of meaning.

MLF: Yes. However, every linguist that I talked to about this thought it was a farce, that it was accidental. George suggested that I look at languages from other parts of the world and get out of the New World to see if there's a relationship. If I found a relationship, the assumption was that it obviously had to be accidental. The assumption was that only languages in some degree of geographical proximity could be demonstrated to be related.

When I began looking at Africa and other places, I began discovering extraordinary resemblances between languages that were geographically very separate. Because of what George had said, I thought there was something wrong here – it can't be. So I stopped looking at all this for a while, but ultimately I couldn't keep from it.

Melissa was at Harvard, and she had in some background in linguistics from Stanford. When I went to visit her I couldn't help but take some dictionaries with me.

For her dissertation, Melissa had worked on Finnish. Child language acquisition is her field, so she examined how children learn Finnish. Because she had a background in Finnish, she suggested a careful examination of the relationship between English and Finnish, as they are not related. Finnish comes from a totally different family. It is related to other languages such as Hungarian and Latvian, things that are quite outside the Indo-European framework. Although geographically very close, they are obviously very different.

So Melissa took an Indo-European dictionary (which I had given her for Christmas) and began looking at English and Finnish, since she knew the background of both of them. She came to the conclusion quite quickly that they had to have been related at some point. This gave me the courage to go back to looking at languages that were geographically distant from one another.

I was relying on sound change being regular, so I had a firm rock that I could stand on. I found that if you took common words, you might find some similarity between them. Yet the key similarity lay in the root part of the word, or it lay in something that could have been an original root. As language changed and suffixes or prefixes adhered more closely, it became harder to sort it out, to see the original root.

JT: Could you explain further what you mean by the “root” of meaning that you were researching across languages?

MLF: As you look at languages to see how closely related they are, you discover that common concepts are expressed in similar ways. If a word – let's say "father", which

is always the prime example – begins with a "p" in Latin, Greek or Sanskrit, it begins with an "f" in Germanic languages, like "fater" or in German it's "fater". There are similarities in that "p" and "f" are both labial consonants that show resemblance to each other. They are made with the lips. The root is the "pah". Attached to it is "ther", clearly a kinship suffix because you find it in other similar words: mother, sister, brother.

So first you have your root. Then something is added to the root. The root is very short (sometimes just a consonant and vowel, sometimes consonant, vowel, consonant.) In English it so happens that the root is the initial part of the word; other languages have suffixes as roots. For example, Tarascan, one of the two languages I've written a grammar for; is completely suffixes. You can have a whole sentence in a word in Tarascan, because you string along a whole series of suffixes onto it, changing or refining the meaning.

Back to the "p" in father: originally it was a "p", then it became "f". More languages have "p" than have "f". You have to make decisions in your analysis whether it was originally a p or an f, when you see that there is a relationship.

JT: That's part of what helped you know which languages were the most closely related.

MLF: Yes. There are language and stocks. Languages within the same families are more closely related.

JT: Families are a sub-set of stocks?

MLF: No, stocks are a sub-set of families. English, with all of its different dialects, is a family. But it's very difficult to sort out, because Germanic is a family that includes English and German and other languages. Then it goes back to Indo-European, because all the languages of Europe (except a very few such as Basque or Finnish) fall into different families that are related. But their relationship goes farther back in time. So there is an intricate set of interrelationships that must be analyzed.

JT: That brings up something I wanted to say, for the record. I think the absolutely unique thing about what you were trying to do is the scope of it. Most academic researchers specialize on a single area that they dive into thoroughly. Your unique challenge was that every time you investigated one linguistic riddle, it opened up new areas for research. That created an endless amount of work for you, but it also provided you the opportunity to discover associations among languages, to establish interrelationships, some of which were extremely useful in postulating migrations patterns.

For example, you explored South American languages and their relationships to other languages of the world. Your findings led you to question the received wisdom that all the migration to the New World happened through the Bering Strait. You postulated that island hopping – from Asia through the South Pacific – was also a factor in populating South America.

MLF: Well, that came much later.

JT: Okay. Anyway, this is an offshoot of what we're talking about earlier: the factors that determined the languages you chose. Finnish was a logical choice because it was from a different language family, plus you had a window into it through Melissa. English wasn't one of your core languages, but you often included it anyway, since we as English speakers can use it as our framework. When you had an English word that had a certain meaning, and the sound obviously matched the root you were investigating, it made the interrelatedness obvious. Although I knew next to nothing about linguistics, it didn't take a huge leap to understand that the English sound matched the proto-language root.

Now I'd like to review the specifics of how we created the body of data in the database: You had an array of shoeboxes with hundreds, perhaps thousands, of slips of paper with language data on them. You had all of this fantastic data, yet you couldn't associate different proto-language sets with each other – you couldn't see them alongside of each other and make comparisons. It cried out for a database solution. That is how we came to work together.

Although I had no background in linguistics, I had some database experience. So I ended up creating a database with a coding system that allowed you to see the data in sequences that were useful to you. I made one database record for each word. Groups of words were listed that corresponded to the units of meaning that you had identified in proto-language. We called these groupings “sets.”

The challenge for me in constructing a database was to devise a way that we could, in a sequential printed fashion, view the data as an integrated, sequenced manuscript. Because many languages are written with special characters (diacritics), the database did not alphabetize automatically, as it does with English-only data. This was one of my biggest challenges in structuring the database and getting it to show your data in the sequences that were most diagnostically useful to you, as well as effective at displaying your findings.

MLF: I had to use diacritics, because some languages have sounds that we don't have in English.

JT: That's why we had to do it with codes. I established coding that forced certain

sort orders according to your purposes. For example, all the records for a certain collection of letters – a certain “root” in proto-language – had the same code. This enabled you to separate these out and view them as a group. Other numerical codes were assigned to make it possible to force alphabetization in other sequences you wanted for other purposes.

Taking a root in primordial language, you looked for an example from each of the ten core languages that had the same sound and general meaning. Sometimes you threw in other languages as well. For some proto-language roots, up to twenty languages were represented, to demonstrate the breadth of interrelatedness across languages. However, in general we worked to develop complete sets that included examples from each of the ten core languages. As I recall, these ten core languages were: Arabic (Ar), Dravidian (Dr), Egyptian (Eg), Finnish (Fi), Hanoonu (Hn) (a Pacific Ocean language), Indo-European (I-E), Japanese (Jp), Pintupi-Lurita (P-L) (Australia), Piro (Pr) (South America), and Wintun (Wn) (California). These were the principle languages you investigated during the time we worked together.

We constructed the database to display words from the various languages, in alphabetical order by language. The root is displayed in the title record in the printout. I created title records and end records, and then I forced the actual word examples to line up in alphabetical sequence between them.

For each entry in the primordial dictionary, you have the title record, all the languages represented in alphabetical order, and then a blank record (blank except for the necessary sequencing codes), which I call the end record. You could alphabetize the full data set to show the dictionary in alphabetical order of the meanings. Or, more typically, you could force it to sort by proto-language order, depending on which was more useful for whatever vein of investigation you were pursuing at any given time.

I was astonished as we got more and more data into the database. I know the short roots had tremendous diagnostic value for you, but what I found especially mind-boggling were the longer roots with several letters strung together. Let's take an example: glottal/C/H/L/K. Longer roots such as this were impossible to find a word for in every core language. Yet it was extraordinary when an association as close as this could be demonstrated. As I recall, you said that languages that shared long roots tended to be more closely related.

Now I'd like to have you comment on the various charts you prepared to accompany the database. It would be valuable to pull together your core charts and indexes, explain what they are, and get the most updated ones together as a set. Let's start with this one. I am now looking at what I am labeling Chart A. It identifies

phememes, both stops and continuants. Could you define phememe?

MLF: A phememe is a sound that has a difference both in the actual physical pronunciation and in the meaning attached to it. Phememes were the sounds that humans started out with, the sounds that subsequently changed in different ways in different languages, stocks, and families over time. The chart is based on a set of sounds that I was able, little by little, to isolate. It took a long time to figure out what the basic sounds were. There had to be a set of sounds that changed in different ways over time to create the languages we have today. Ultimately, I isolated and identified these core sounds.

JT: So this is the basic alphabet of primordial language?

MLF: You could say that. It is what enabled me to write out the proto-language equivalents. I'm struggling right now with getting the charts fully corrected.

JT: Even if they have an error here or there, they are still a fundamental piece of evidence.

Here is a chart that I'm going to label Chart B. It's called Alpha Sequence Codes. This reflects the build-up order that we used to sequence the data. You start with glottal, then you add H, then you take all the permutations of glottal H, then you continue with the rest of the letters in alpha order. The order of the alpha sequence codes is correlated as closely as possible to English alphabetical sequence (C, K, L, M, and so on).

MLF: Glottal stop and H are both articulated back in the muscles in the larynx, so they are called laryngeal sounds. At first I hadn't thought of them. Well, "H" I would have differentiated, but glottal stop was not something I thought about for a long time. Then I discovered that it was the glottal stop and H contrast that had started the whole thing off. Everything was built up from there.

If you had two sounds that had meaning, that made a difference. They had to have been these two laryngeal sounds, because if you go through the alphabet you discover that glottal stop had occurred before voiceless consonants like "P". When you're differentiating with P and B, the only difference with what you are doing with your muscles is to have a –

JT: (You're blocking the air.)

MLF: Yes, thank you.

JT: So, back to the chart. Now that this particular order is established, it means that any word that has HL as the proto-language form is given code #75, because it

corresponds to HL. That way, all HL sets fall in the same place in the order. This is a way to create a proto-language dictionary with coherence in its sort order, so the words aren't all over the place. What this enabled you to do was to see the build-ups more systematically. You could take a glottal, then you could work in an H, then you could keep building up consonants and see how the meaning changed.

If you have a glottal/H/P/glottal/L, that's also a glottal/H/P set and should be seen in the body of glottal/H/P sets, as well as in the subset of other sets with the same root. One should expect to see fewer examples in the glottal/H/P/glottal/L sets, but the languages that reflect a longer root are likely to be more closely related to one another than languages for which you could not find a word with that particular root and meaning.

MLF: Correct, good.

JT: Once the coding was developed, we could easily print indexes. You could print either an index of the words, or you could print the full set of data with all of its examples. The printout that was generally the most useful to you was the one that contained all of the word examples from the core languages.

MLF: I looked at the meanings, partly the meanings with the sounds.

JT: I found the cognate set indexes to be quite interesting as well, though, and highly useful. For example: if you wanted to, you could sort the cognate sets by meaning. To make this possible, we came up with names within which related types of meaning could share the same overarching meaning. This meant that they would be displayed together when the sets were sorted in alpha order by domain.

For example, I'm looking at "Count, Measure: Apportion." There are several different specific domains that have this as a general meaning. Even though the proto-language words are in a different order, you can group them alphabetically by domain to see all the different combinations that were used to convey that generic meaning. Or you can sort by alphabetical proto-language order – in other words, in the coded proto-language order that we established. This sequence allows you to study fine-tuning of the meanings of different sounds.

So: one index is Cognate Set Index Alpha by Meaning [is that Chart C?]. The other is Cognate Set Index: Alpha by Proto Language, Chart D. These two charts give a survey of your findings, in that they are an index of proto-language roots and their associated meanings.

MLF: It's interesting to me to see that you have translated one code into another.

JT: I was just trying to give you a way to show what you had found. I found it extraordinary, as a lay person, that you had essentially cracked the code of language, from its earliest antecedents.

To me, one of your most valuable insights, based on your data, is that language had to have been formed in a single location (Africa) before the dispersal of human populations. You concluded this because you found interrelatedness that included the Australian aborigine language, Finnish – indeed, every language you examined, as far as I could tell. My goal was to put the evidence together as coherently as possible, so that someone with the relevant background would be able to engage with it and build on it down the road.

You have always been concerned about errors that creep in – accents that might be missing, and so on. Yet those things can be checked. I think that we have enough data here that someone who knows how to use the dictionaries would be able to go through, verify the accuracy, and make needed corrections. We certainly made a great attempt to achieve accuracy. You pored over these printouts, you found errors, we fixed them – over and over again. As a result, I believe that there is a tremendous amount of accuracy in this database. Occasionally, errors may have crept in – an accent may have been lost here or there. Still, this is a formidable body of data that someone really needs to confront.

MLF: Good, you're articulating it very well, better than I could.

That also gets me back to why I chose the languages that I did: partly because I wanted to include a wide geographical spread of the languages that nobody else supposed were related. (An exception: I have used Egyptian and Arabic for other reasons.) Basically, languages that aren't as closely related have made changes that are very different from each other. So I tried to get as many crucial differences into it as I could. I found that I couldn't handle more than, let's say, ten languages. So I had to choose languages that were the most useful to me, in terms of the kinds of sounds that they contained and the relationship of the sounds to what I was establishing as the original proto-language sounds.

I could have chosen a lot of other languages, but there were other factors involved. Above all, I had to have good dictionaries. I had to have something to base the work on. I also tried to choose languages that were far apart, and that showed as many contrasts as possible. There were crucial sequences that I could go back to in evaluating what was more closely related. Eventually, if I looked at a different language that I had never previously examined, I could see how it fit in to the whole picture quite easily. I could quickly determine how it related to what I had already done.

JT: When I first started, you had not picked core languages, so the languages were somewhat all over the place. The trouble with that was that it was more difficult to know if you were systematically demonstrating things. The advantage, once we picked ten, was that it put parameters on the direction of your inquiry. It challenged you to want to find words in the missing languages, to complete those sets.

Now back to the charts. I'm calling the "Best of Best" sets Chart E. My note on this is that these have been relatively well combed through. You have checked them quite thoroughly, looking for errors. The Best of Best sets include most, if not all, of the ten core languages. Again, you might have added words since you did the thorough check for accuracy, so it's not that these still wouldn't need to be verified, but I predict that the amount of errors would prove to be quite low in the "Best of Best" sets. If someone wanted a quick window into the strongest demonstration of your findings, to me the "Best of Best" sets would be a great starting point.

MLF: It was crucial to the whole process to have somebody who could translate it into a coded system. The fact that you understood it made a big difference in how fast it could get articulated. You were such a crucial part of it.

JT: That's kind of you to say... What I noticed, too, was that once we were able to visually and sequentially display your findings, this opened up greater ability for you to clarify and investigate the holes and the unsolved puzzles.

MLF: Exactly. You've been a great factor, a boon to the whole thing.

JT: Isn't it funny how life works? I do have a love of the language. I don't have a love of the details. I've always been a big picture gal, but my specialty is communication.

MLF: My problem is I'm a big picture gal as well.

JT: I think that's partly why we were able to understand each other.

MLF: I have to know the details in order to have the big picture.

JT: I'm less strong at that. Nonetheless, I did attend to the details, because the project demanded it.

One thing I think would be good to explain is that once you found these words examples in the different dictionaries, you made a proto-language reconstruction for them. You figured out the sound, then translated the sound into a proto-language form.

By the way, I never could understand how you were able to do that. For

example, Egyptian is a dead language – how did you determine what it sounded like in order to make those evaluations of the proto-language form?

MLF: Because of the Rosetta Stone. Fortunately, Egyptian had been broken down into its components, in written form. This made it possible for them to translate Egyptian, which was written hieroglyphically. They figured out what sounds were represented by the hieroglyphics.

JT: So there is a commonly recognized set of sounds that related to the specific hieroglyphics – you didn't have to guess at what the sound correspondences had been.

MLF: Yes, that's what the Rosetta Stone did. It made it possible to use Egyptian and see how it related to Arabic, for example.

JT: I see. And of course, Arabic is still in use. Although you were doing ancient Arabic, weren't you?

MLF: No, I used classical Arabic.

JT: Obviously, with living languages, it's easy to know the sounds. Is the Australian aboriginal Pintupi-Lurita language still in use?

MLF: Oh yes, very actively.

JT: So, using the dictionary, you could discern what sounds were represented in the words?

MLF: Yes. Most dictionaries have keys to sounds. Dictionaries of obscure languages have to provide a clue as to what the sounds represent.

JT: Again, part of the uniqueness of your project is the astonishing breadth of languages you investigated. This is a slight aside, but I am recalling many times that you sat with numerous dictionaries open in a circle around you as you went back and forth among them, correlating and looking for words. You searched for words in particular languages that had a certain root sound and a certain meaning. You took each of the dictionaries and looked in the section of the dictionary that corresponded to the root sound that you were seeking. Over and over again, you found what you were looking for. From my perspective, it was amazing to see!

MLF: That's why it's so entertaining all the time to me – because I find new relationships. It's such a vast project; you can't ever finish it. I make discoveries every five minutes. It's just wonderful. You just can't stop doing it. It's like eating peanuts.

JT: There are far less problematic addictions!

MLF: Well it's a productive addiction at least.

JT: It is. You sometimes reminded me of a child who follows a butterfly, then the butterfly takes her in a different direction, then that takes her off on yet another "tangent."

MLF: It can be distracting.

JT: It seemed to me that often you were seeking evidence that tracked the timing of human settlement of certain areas. You were looking to establish levels of relatedness among languages. Essentially, you were trying to figure out the family tree of language.

MLF: I still am.

JT: I was always most interested in your discovery of primordial language, probably the earliest manifestation of language. As you have said, people really haven't dared to traverse past Indo-European. They felt that was the farthest back that one could reconstruct.

Let me pause here and ask you to define reconstruct.

MLF: To reconstruct is to take an existing sequence of sounds and see how they interrelate when you attach meanings to a sequence of sounds.

JT: I remember the first day or two, when you were trying to fill me in on your project. If someone lacks familiarity with the scope of what you're trying to do, it's initially hard to grasp due to the originality and unfamiliarity of it. It's makes it hard to explain it to people.

Part of the reason I wanted to get this on tape is that I feel privileged to have been able to serve as a bridge. I am a lay person who "got it" – I got glimmers anyway, at close range, of what you have discovered.

MLF: Definitely the best bridge that could have been invented.

JT: I think I have helped you to articulate it in ways that can consolidate your findings. My objective is to make this aspect of your work accessible to others who might eventually pick up on it and further investigate language origins, building upon your data. I had to do something with those shoeboxes of data slips! We took it a long way, didn't we?

MLF: I still have the shoeboxes.

JT: Scary! Okay, I've pulled out another chart. I'm labeling this Chart F. It's called the Phememic System: Point of Articulation. Let me explain what I see it as, and then you can correct me – because I've never understood this part of it as well. You have marked the categories Labial, Dental, Alveopalette, Vilar and Laryngeal. These are categories of sound. On the left side you have stops, resonants, and glides. This relates to your discoveries of how the gestural shape of the mouth related to units of meaning.

MLF: Which is the crucial thing.

JT: I understand this is a crucial point. Yet I can see how this could seem more extrapolated to people than some of your other findings. What you've done is to provide general meanings that associate with particular sounds in proto-language. I believe you have written several articles about this aspect of your work.

MLF: This part is crucial, because it gets to the evolutionary aspect of it. This is what shows how animal communication could have developed into language.

JT: I understand. So, this takes a stab at explaining how language began. It shows how the shape of the mouth could have been used efficiently to convey gestures and movements that held units of meaning.

MLF: It's just a more delicate way of using your musculature.

JT: It made more combinations of meaning possible. People started conveying meaning though mouth shapes and through the sounds that came out differently according to different shapes of the mouth. Then it accelerated because it was such an efficient conveyor of meaning. That's when language took off.

MLF: Yes, that's a great statement.

JT: You see, you thought you were just talking to a brick wall all those times! Here and there, it soaked in.

MLF: No, I thought you were wonderful because you caught on. It's hard to get people to catch on. They think that what I am doing can't be done, because it sounds so impossible.

JT: The evidence you have gathered is compelling, and speaks for itself. Maybe my lucky break was not knowing enough about how "impossible" it was, so I was able to believe what I saw with my very own eyes, as the evidence built.

Now we have a table that you'll have to explain to me: "Laryngeal Semi-Vocalic Fusion and Loss; Initial Before Vowel Plus Consonant." What is this about?

MLF: Let me look at the chart... I discovered that laryngeal onsets were crucial. I could take the original sounds and show how language could get as complicated as it did, in so many different ways.

If you stop and think about all the muscular movements you have to have to speak any syllable, it's quite extraordinary. Once I had discovered these laryngeals, it gave me a fabulous clue as to how language built in so many variations, how many different thousands of languages there are in the world that differentiate sounds from each other. Starting from a very limited numbers of sounds, a complex system of meanings was built up.

For me, this was my own Rosetta Stone. I was able to figure out how language held together, how it worked, and how it could be so complicated. Once you took the semi-vowels "y" and "w", which are sounds; "y" is the "yuh" sound back here, it changes the position of your lips. "w" you round out, "wee". What you're doing with the muscles of your mouth is important. If you say "yee", you spread your mouth out so there's a difference between your articulator movement and what is added to it from your throat. If you make a sound back here, a neutral sound like "uh" or "ah", "ah" is not so neutral because it's lower down. You have to know a little bit about the physiology of the oral tract to see this.

In any case, I discovered how you could get all these variations, and that's what this chart represents. It's the differences if you have a glottal stop followed by a "w" type of sound. That would be "huhwuh". Or an "h" followed by an "h" which would be "huhwuh."

It's interesting to think about permutations of combinations. If you take just a few things and move them around, it makes such a difference. This chart simply represents those differences.

JT: Okay. This is great to get these charts identified and described.

Here we have a chart showing the various diacritics – special accent marks – that were used in the languages you included in your data sample. The diacritics chart is different from your other charts in that it does not relate to your discoveries; it's just a list of diacritics the database used in order to reflect the language data accurately. I would guess that the list of diacritics is probably is incomplete at this point, in that it may not include languages you have worked with the last few years – since we made this chart.

Next we have a chart that you have called "Phememe Fusion." My understanding of this is that it refers to what happens when you throw different key units of meaning together so that they combine into one new sound. Is that an

accurate way to put it?

MLF: Yes. It all depends where you make your divisions – I guess whether you're dividing into new sounds or not. For example, combining the "h" sound with a "w" sound – that to me is fusion. If you say "huhwuh" it's a fusion of the "h" with the "w" but it's more complicated than that. If you take the glottal stop and combine it with a "p", it changes a "p" to a "b" type sound, because you're vibrating your vocal chords.

JT: I thought glottal/h/p would be a "b".

MLF: Well, it is in English, but that doesn't matter.

JT: I always was too English-oriented because it's the only language I knew. I couldn't grasp the subtleties of the other languages you used.

MLF: Well you'll see from this chart that if you take "ht", it has a different effect in different languages. In English the fusion hasn't changed anything, because it hasn't changed meanings. But if it's changed from putting a glottal stop before a "k" sound, it changes the voiceless sound of "k" to a voiced sound "g". It's the same, except that you're vibrating. You had to have the differentiation of sounds, as the various languages evolved, or you wouldn't have differences in meaning.

JT: I see. One thing that I noticed with these tables is that you were concerned with various problems with them and you'd say, "Oh, this is wrong." You were always fine-tuning it as you made more discoveries. Yet it seemed to me that basically, once you established the charts, they didn't change much from there.

MLF: I've been trying to boil it down and refine it so that the dictionary, as you're calling it, shows the differences. It's very difficult, because I find new things about it all the time, and I have to change the charts. There's no final point to it in some sense.

JT: To me that does not undermine the validity of what you have found.

One thing that is a bit of a tangent, but I do wonder about, is this. It seems to me that a huge part of your work has centered around the discoveries that you made about symbolism. I remember you said that you had written an entry on symbolism for an encyclopedia of anthropology. Could you explain how your work with symbolism and your research on language origins fed into each other and were part of the same work?

MLF: People define the word symbol in different ways. I ran an interdisciplinary symposium in Austria in the 1980s. People interpreted symbolism in such varying

How could frame it so that everybody could agree on what we were saying? Actually, it was quite an interesting exercise.

I differentiate between a signal and a symbol. Both of them are communication devices. A dog urinating is making a signal – as long as it's conveying some kind of meaning to another creature, it's a signal.

All animals can do is produce something that has a simple meaning, such as a roadside signal. It's in the here and now. When it changes to a symbol, that marks the key difference between human communication and animal communication.

JT: In other words, a signal doesn't take you to some other extrapolated place... That makes me think of another question I'm eager to ask. When did the signals of animals transfer into the symbology of what became human language?

What I'm really getting at is this: have you ever roughly estimated a range of time within which you believe primordial language was born? What is your hypothesis about how it evolved? Was it a gradual thing, with gestures becoming language over thousands of years? What's your image of the birth of primordial language, and the timing of it?

MLF: You asked something a while ago that showed how things could speed up – how language could get started and how it could speed up. Now I've forgotten what you said, but it was useful. The more you use something in different kinds of situations, the more new meanings you are building in. So a signal, let's say, becomes so refined that it has a whole series of meanings. It isn't just stop or start or something like that. Those are symbols. Any signal in language can also be used as a symbol.

JT: Let's go back the question of timing, as it relates to the origin of language. I know this is quite speculative, and it cannot be easy to pin it down. Still, knowing what you do about the timing of the oldest languages that we can identify, is it possible to work backwards to gain a rough approximation of when humans might first have developed a useable language?

MLF: It's awfully hard to do. First you have to correlate it to what people were doing at that point, if you can figure that out. But prehistory is built up from artifacts, and unless you can figure out what people were doing, because of changes reflected in artifacts, you don't really have any clue to intellectual developmental sequences. For that reason, it's hard to set up a timetable for anything that far back in time. You can set it up sequentially to a certain extent, but you can't determine the exact timing. By the way, this is why archeology and linguistics go well together – it's hard to delve into one arena without drawing on the understandings of the other.

There's a lot of work going on now in cognition and the relationship between cognition and language. Melissa's working on that with her colleagues, and it's really quite fascinating. It has to disentangle the two things. But with language, you have to think about the starting point. That's why I found it such an epiphany to discover these laryngeal distinctions, because it was a huge cornerstone to understanding how the language was put together and how it became so complicated in individual cases.

JT: Okay. Now, just to come back to this question of the timing: have they dated, roughly, a time when populations began moving out of Africa?

MLF: I guess so, but I can't give you the dates.

JT: So, would it be fair to say that at whatever time that was, the evidence you've found points to the formation of language prior to the dispersal of populations from Africa?

MLF: I see what you're getting at. Yes, it would all be related, in the germ of it, in the beginning. You're right, language had to be in position in order for the dispersal to retain evidence of what happened.

JT: I think that's a hugely important point. I can't see how anyone else would have any basis for postulating the date of the origin of language. Your evidence and the dating of when populations might have been dispersing can provide such a basis.

MLF: That's true. I hadn't thought of it that way, but I can see that it's true.

JT: That to me is one of the most exciting discoveries of all your many discoveries! I'm less into the niceties. I'm big on, "When did human have language?"

MLF: Okay, let's say that they had to have language prior to dispersing, in order for us to be able to trace the dispersal by finding the same root and associated meaning across languages.

JT: Here is another question: what were some of the biggest epiphanies you had in the course of this work?

MLF: The first epiphany was when I was about three years old. My mother had put my sister and me to bed. I was lying there and I began to cry. She heard me crying and came in and said, "Why are you crying?" And I said, "Because everything eats everything else." It was an epiphany that was useful, because I somehow understood that it had to be this way. How could the world operate if things didn't start and end? There had to be some way that this happened. So you had to get rid of stuff before you could have anything new. By the time I had worked my way through feeling that this was so awful to feeling that this was the way it had to work, it changed my whole

perspective. It really was an extraordinary experience.

JT: You actually remember that? From age three?

MLF: Of course. I was two or three. I learned to read when I was three.

JT: That's really something.

MLF: I think there are quite a few people who learn to read at two or three.

JT: You are someone who has always been interested in understanding the world around you. I think you were born to be an anthropologist.

MLF: I do too. But I had the advantage that I had very curious parents. They were both writers. My father was terribly interested in other parts of the world, in geography and so on, and learning about things. We began learning French as a family when I was in early high school. For four or five years we had a French teacher. She was a teacher at the high school. She came every Tuesday night and had dinner with us, and we spoke nothing but French during dinner. After dinner we had our French lesson. By the time I went through that, I was certainly not fluent, but I had a basic understanding of French.

Then my parents pulled up stakes when I was 16. The first time we went to Europe was when I was 15. The next year they decided to give up their jobs with the newspaper, and do freelance writing and photography. My father was a photographer. So they put us in school in Switzerland first. The student body was small; there weren't any native French speakers. The teachers always spoke French to us and we spoke French for the schoolwork. But we had Dutch roommates, and they spoke good English, as most educated Dutch people do. So in our off moments from school we spoke mostly English. We decided that we should live with French families in order to really absorb it.

We had started in early November. In February our parents came and picked us up and took us to Grenoble, where we looked for families with kids that were more or less our ages. We spent two years there. We had exposure to other ways of life and other languages. Then we went to Austria for just a few months toward the end of that. We took German lessons while we were in France.

My parents also sent us off to camp in the east, in New Hampshire because we lived in Iowa and they thought we should have some experience with other perspectives.

JT: So you had circumstances that had a broadening effect, early on. This probably agreed with your temperament.

MLF: I began to see how things differed and that helped me in my language work.

JT: It seems to me that the core of what drove and launched your career was that broad-minded desire to understand different cultures from a detached, reflective point of view that understood differences. The linguistic part almost arose accidentally, didn't it

MLF: We accidentally started studying the language –

JT: Because you had to communicate with the people there?

MLF: No, no that didn't matter. We communicated in Spanish, but they were so suspicious of us we had to explain why we were there. We had to get people to talk to us. We had to tell them that we were interested in something. So George came up with the idea that we could tell them we were interested in language.

We actually paid an informant to come and sit with us. After he worked in his fields all day, he would come and answer our questions about the language. In the course of this we got a lot of stories. We got him to narrate things for us. I couldn't have written the grammar if I hadn't had all these narrations, because I had to know how the language was put together.

JT: To me, to say that you write a grammar is extraordinary. You basically heard the sounds of the language and then wrote down how to assign certain letters to represent certain sounds.

MLF: We had to figure out the system. Some languages are easy and some are hard. As it turns out, it was a fairly easy language to represent phonetically.

JT: Frankly, to me you're a language genius.

MLF: I had background for it.

JT: You went through the transition of going from spoken language to getting it into written form. You leapt that divide. Culturally that's such an interesting part of human experience. When spoken things are put down on paper, so much becomes possible at a cultural level.

MLF: Yes. The invention of writing stopped time in its tracks.

JT: ...and gave evidence on paper that related to that time.

MLF: But language made it possible to have something to start with.

JT: Fascinating! ...Now let me return again to practicalities. You were talking about the fact that you were frustrated at the remaining holes in the data, and you want to fill in the languages and sets.

MLF: Yes, I have these ten languages, actually it's more than ten. Where there are

holes, it would be so satisfying to get them filled in. It's time consuming, but it's the most fun.

JT: Do you think that someone else, if they wanted to come in and follow what you've done, would be able to.

MLF: I sincerely hope so.

JT: My intention all along was to complete as many sets as possible, because to me that gives incontrovertible evidence of the validity of your proto-language discoveries.

If you have a set that has eight languages and is missing two, and you have someone who could look at the sound of the root, could they theoretically fill in the blanks?

MLF: Theoretically they could. But I think you almost have to know everything I know to do it. That's why I hate to have these holes.

Sometimes I have just two languages, yet it's something fascinating. Every set shows me some problem or shows me a different way perhaps of dealing with it.

JT: That's where you get into trouble, because you might take a set with only two words and work that all through –

MLF: Exactly, because that's what excites me. Just filling in, I don't mind it as long as it's giving me some food for thought.

JT: Given what you're saying, that maybe it's time to quit leaning on the dictionary so hard. Perhaps it's time to consolidate your gains?

MLF: The time is running out. As you know, I'm always sort of reluctant to admit that the time is running out, but obviously it is.

JT: Well who knows, and that time could run on for a while. I certainly hope so – I want you around for as long as we possibly can have you! Yet I do feel that this is a window of opportunity to get systematic about securing your findings for posterity.

MLF: What I'm trying to do is not so much fill in the sets, but to fill in problem areas so that I'm sure that I've got this right. I find problems when I go through it. Then I have to try and straighten them out.

The whole thing hinges on the details. The details have got to be correct because every time I've tried to show it to some linguist, they pick on something. They ignore the parts that are okay and focus on something wrong.

JT: But I think that anyone who would look at what you're trying to do as a whole owes you some forgiveness, some slack, given the scope of what you are trying to do. They cannot expect one hundred percent, because the scope is so large. To me, if you have 97% accuracy, to pick it apart for the 3% of things that might not totally square it

away doesn't ring true.

MLF: Well, what you are always thinking about is how it's going to make an impact on somebody. What I'm interested in is whether it is going to endure. So that it influences the way people work.

JT: Okay, that's a great thing to say. What can be done in terms of the things you have pulled together – the background data, the printouts, related articles – what can we do to take this to a place where it has the best chance of being transmittable, in a way that can have an influence on people?

MLF: I think talking to you will be influential, because you're somebody that started out with no knowledge of it and worked your way through. You're still trying to work your way through it. I think the more that gets elucidated, the more valuable it is. I've tried to explain it to people as I've gone along and tried to understand the hang-ups they have; what are the stumbling blocks? What is it that makes it so impossible for people to see it? I've been struggling for years with this.

JT: I think that academia is posed to have its own ways and its own rules in its own time.

MLF: Prejudices. In linguistics, people get stuck in tracks and they can't think beyond it.

JT: That's probably not unique to linguistics.

MLF: But it is particularly true of linguistics.

JT: Putting aside the fact that skeptical people haven't gotten it (and who knows if they ever will) – if it were to have the kind of staying power that you would wish, moving into the knowledge base that influences things, what would be your ideal picture of how this set of discoveries bears on the field of linguistics?

MLF: That's what I've been struggling with all along, and I haven't found any solution. That's why I said talking to you and the questions you're asking, since you're asking them with some kind of informed mind (where often I'm trying to explain it to people who never thought about it at all), is helpful in making me see where people are having trouble. Just the spots where you said you're not exactly having trouble, but you have questions, is most informative. Some things are quite clear to you. I don't think people are in tuned to look at things in this way. I can't quite say what it is. But it has to do with some kind of scientific approach.

JT: Maybe that's why – because I'm so relatively unscientific.

MLF: True, but it doesn't block you. With so many people it serves as such a block that they can't think of it that way. To me, the whole thing rests on a firm basis in fact. Without fact, it's nothing, it's like pie in the sky. Or it's just somebody's ideas.

JT: The metaphor that occurs to me – that's another reason we've gotten along, because I'm a metaphor lover too – is of a crime case where the markers look so evident that it leads one to assume a certain direction of culpability. Then one tiny turn, and the whole picture changes. There is an "aha" moment. It's hard to get people to that point, especially when it appears that such a leap would undermine or discredit them in their field. The field counts on a certain set of parameters and possibilities. Anyone who steps outside of that has to be brave to do it.

In your case, you have looked at the data closely and seen it with your own eyes. You have had to stretch your parameters of possibility, based on what you've discovered. Someone who hasn't actually worked through the data and made the discoveries for themselves would find it difficult to borrow on the certainty of discovery that you so uniquely possess.

MLF: There's a crucial thing here that has to do with being interested in likenesses and recognizing likenesses in a very general sort of way. You caught on right away to the fact that that in order to fit these in, you had to have generalized meanings. You were helpful in helping me arrive at ways to sum up the meanings, through overarching domains that grouped words of related meaning.

JT: I remember that initially when we defined words, the definitions were all over the map. We had to find a way to standardize them.

MLF: We had to keep boiling it down.

JT: Yes, because it was essential to group words of related meanings that they could alphabetize together and appear alongside one another, for purposes of comparison. That's why we created the general categories – the overarching domains.

MLF: You and I could see that there was a generalized likeness, but we didn't always know how to get other people to see it.

Back to my choice of core languages, I should state here that Arabic has been one of the most useful languages. This is partly because the classical Arabic ignores the dialectical problems. Arabic and Egyptian have retained the H, the laryngeal situation, as well as the H/glottal stop dichotomy. Most languages have lost that. I fall back on Arabic and Egyptian quite a lot for discovering new laryngeal solutions.

JT: Another thing that intrigued me was the Pintupi-Larita.

MLF: I arbitrarily picked out an Australian language to work into my research. I didn't do it for any other reason, except that it is hard to find dictionaries, and I found a good one for Pintupi-Larita. (You can't even find good dictionaries in the library, and even if you could, you cannot check them out forever the way I would need to. I found good dictionaries that are useful for me, then I have stuck with those.)

The interesting thing with Pintupi-Larita is that there were no migrations. These people stayed in one place for a very long time, so they didn't have a lot of external influences that changed their language. They retained a lot of things that other languages lost.

Australian languages have a wide range of origins. Sixty thousand years seems to be the agreed upon date now for when Australia got populated, based on evidence from archeological digs. Cave paintings and things like that can be dated. So Australian languages bring you closer to being able to date language developments than any other set of languages.

JT: Because of the geographical containment.

MLF: Because there weren't any migrations of populations into the area. It was settled, and that was that – there wasn't access. To assume access, you have to assume a lot more boat possibilities than are usually considered realistic.

Back then, sixty thousand years ago, there were many more land bridges that could account for it having been settled. Subsequently, access was cut off by rising seas. It was a similar situation with the Bering Strait. The Bering Strait, like Australia, allowed for the possibility of infiltration before a certain period or after a certain period. It's possible to date those two things.

Migration into the Americas only took place twelve thousand years ago, whereas with Europe and Australia it's sixty thousand years ago. That's a huge difference.

JT: I'm trying to think of my other main questions. I might be running out. Here's another exhibit. This is called the language list. This is a list of all languages that are contained in the database, and it's a very long list. Some are more tangential than others – for some languages, you've thrown in examples here and there, but you haven't worked with them systematically.

That reminds me to mention an innovation we came up with along the way. We eventually coded the languages to reflect whether they were one of your ten key languages. This gave you the ability to select either a full display of all words associated with a particular set of roots, or to narrow it down only to the core languages. To me, a huge step in solidifying your data was to narrow the focus so that you could have more solid examples.

MLF: The reason that I didn't want to use the ones that aren't key languages is that the data backing up the reconstructions is not as secure. I don't like to include extra languages if I'm not absolutely certain of what the reconstructions should be – what the sound correspondences are. That is why I boiled it down to ten languages – partly because I couldn't cope with more in a systematic way.

JT: Okay, now here is what I envision as a way to make this body of research

accessible to others. If we get this conversation transcribed and edited, that would be a helpful window into the project, offering an overview of the nature and scope of your research. Add to that a table of contents, the different A through I tables (with a short explanation about the purpose of each table), the full sets printout, and a printout of the best of best sets, and you have a pretty good compilation of this body of research.

[end of transcript]

COGNITIVE REQUISITES FOR LANGUAGE*

Mary LeCron Foster

Certain widely accepted tenets have implicitly or explicitly received common acceptance as requisite to the invention of language. In all scientific endeavors received wisdom often proves to be a relic of outmoded paradigms and must be explored and discarded if progress is to be made. I discuss seven such concepts here in an effort to advance thinking about language origins. In order of discussion, these concepts are:

1. That evolution is determined by "selfish genes."
2. That language originated for communicative purposes.
3. That language originated in animal vocalization.
4. That language was semantically concrete before it became abstract.
5. That linguistic tokens have always been arbitrary.
6. That an ability to manipulate unmotivated tokens was a prerequisite for language.
7. That it is impossible to discover the nature of prehistoric language through comparison of historical languages.

Parenthetically, I should also like to add that too many investigators into language origins have little understanding of the nature of linguistic structure. Language origins can only be studied seriously if basic structure, in all of its elaborate conceptual abstraction, is made an integral part of the biological equation. It is unfortunate that more biologists than linguists are seriously examining language origins. Both are badly needed if progress is to be made.

1. That social evolution is determined by "selfish genes." This is a shorthand description of the sociobiological argument that the drive to deliberately exploit favorable environments in order to increase its reproductive success at the expense of that of rival populations is carried within an individual gene. Wilson (1975) contrasts gene "selfishness" with gene "altruism"--an expanded form of self interest that includes members of the kin group. Although sociobiologists would probably deny it, their argument is teleological in attributing purposeful planning for a distant goal to an instinct-driven organism. (Alternatively, it could imply a divine consciousness at work favoring evolutionary progress culminating in mankind--something that Darwin specifically rejected.)

In a discussion of the way in which terminological usages reflect implicit theoretical positions, Parker and Baars (1990, 65) point out that in scholarly practice, as in daily life, we often use words without knowing exactly what we mean by them. At the same time, the words we use and the way we use them reflect our implicit, unconscious knowledge, presuppositions, and theories. Words and phrases that find their way into scientific discourse can often subtly prejudice discussion. The implication that the "selfish gene" has knowledge of its goal is a case of such terminological prejudicing. Parker and Baars (1990, 68) quote Oyama (1985, 121): "fate is constructed, amended and reconstructed, partly by the emerging organism itself. It is known to no one, not even the genes", and further: (125) "Since all aspects of phenotype are products of ontogenesis, they are all in some sense acquired." The authors go on to say: "The shift in

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paradigm from a teleonomic readout of preformed information to the contingent construction of developmental information will inevitably influence models of behavioral development and hence comparative developmental psychology."

Borchert and Zihlman (1990, 18) also urge such a paradigm shift:

Reductionist reasoning which focuses on genes needs to be replaced by a systems approach to organisms and to evolution, an approach that emphasizes that genes are regulated by levels above the genome. . . . The biochemical environment of the cell, the extracellular tissue environment, the physiological status of the organ system, etc.--all these are aspects of the genome's environment. Through the interlocking of biochemical, physiological, hormonal, and behavioral subsystems, the genes are regulated to some extent by social behavior and the social environment as well. Because these multiple "layers" of environment regulate gene expression, they also then "create" selection pressures to which the gene pool responds.

They go on to say that because the role in determining the phenotype which is played by events outside the genome are poorly understood, they have tended to be ignored. Neo-Darwinism has overemphasized natural selection, which, while it may ultimately have promoted language evolution, does not address the prior problem of what prompted infants to master linguistic skills en route to adulthood in the first place.

Selective pressures surely increased the adaptiveness of language-speaking primates, but it is hard to imagine how a "selfish gene" can have been responsible for its invention. Many factors are at work in any evolutionary scenario, which is surely unplanned in allowing for random variation in which innovation may or may not ultimately prove to be of adaptive advantage. Since the immensely complicated cognitive system that is language necessarily required millenia to develop, the adaptive advantage of language as we know it was greatly delayed. Pre-language was probably more in the nature of playful interaction between mother and child, and whatever advantage it possessed at its inception had more to do with social bonding than with information exchange in the pursuit of economic advantage.

2. That language originated for communicative purposes is usually taken for granted. This assumption is often coupled with an evolutionary economic determinism that considers hunting and improved hunting techniques important to hominid survival. This is a curious assumption since our primate relatives have survived nicely as gatherers, requiring neither hunting abilities nor language. We surely use language as much to communicate with ourselves as with one another. If, as I believe, steps leading ultimately to language came about randomly, they are more likely to have occurred during leisure or play than during purposeful activities.

The young of many animals do learn survival skills through play, showing it to be adaptive. Primate mimicry is a fairly random play activity that stems from curiosity about the environment and results in its manipulation. This may be repeated, imitated, and perpetuated if it is perceived as providing some advantage. Play, bolstered by mimicry, then serves a purpose which is initially unplanned. Language is most likely to have begun as such a random activity, with no immediate adaptive value beyond that of social integration.

3. The assumption that language originated in animal vocalization is commonly made. This is a *cul de sac* for investigation of origins because animals use calls for signaling rather than for representation, and representation of one thing by another is crucial to language. Vocalization is not, despite the fact that it was the channel through which language developed. If humans intended only signaling, and not representation, gesture and variation in shouts would be sufficient. An extraordinary cognitive leap was needed for a transition from vocal signaling to representation. Representation lacks the cause-effect immediacy of signaling, but when fully developed, makes planning for the future possible.

4. That language was semantically concrete before it became abstract is often assumed, probably partly because of the causative concreteness of a prior ability to signal, partly because games with small children involve pointing and naming, giving prominence to objects, and partly because of a limited understanding of the nature of language itself. Language is not--as is often naively assumed--a process of naming: giving arbitrary labels to objects. While names can be applied to objects, no word (except in rare cases of personal names) is applied to a single object and no other. Calling language "naming," as is often done, obscures rather than elucidates its flexibility. The generic, or generalizable use of linguistic signs is completely abstract, however concrete it may become when words are syntactically juxtaposed to make them apply to particular situations. If words had been applied only to particular situations from their inception, a route toward their present abstractness is difficult to envision. On the other hand, if we assume that some kind of abstractness, in the sense of generalizability, was a characteristic of language from its first beginnings, a believable scenario for evolutionary progression toward ultimate syntactic specificity can be devised.

5. The assumption is also commonly made that linguistic tokens must always have been arbitrary. Saussure (1959) showed insight in pointing out lack of iconism between a named object or experience and its means of designation, but neither he nor Hockett (1960), who perpetuated this finding as a design feature of language, recognized that language is not based on naming but on abstraction. This error has become a thoroughly counterproductive common assumption in the attempt to devise an evolutionary scenario for language. As a simple illustration of an instinctive ability to use analogy for abstraction: a baby commonly learns the meaning of the word "nose" by imitating caregivers who touch the baby's nose and their own while saying the word. The baby, signaled by the word, does not assume that only its own nose is intended. With no difficulty, it abstracts this concept by pointing to its own nose, another's nose, or even less iconically, to the nose of a dog or cat, when given the appropriate signal. In reacting to language the baby does not assume that "nose" applies to a single object. While the word is not iconic with any nose, it is arbitrary only in that sense. It receives its motivation from the varied environments in which it may appear.

A major "design feature" of language, unfortunately overlooked by Hockett, was that a language is a very complex system of classification of experience. Classification implies recognition of some kind of likeness between class members. This likeness may be obviously iconic--for example, "dog" is a class because of the shared physical characteristics of members subsumed under the class designation "dog"--or it may be operational--for example, "weapon" is a class because, although its members may be physically very dissimilar, they are members of the weapon class because of similarity in usage. This is not primary but secondary iconism. Class membership may seem still less iconic when it is used only in a relational sense. In algebraic equations, x may represent anything as long as its relationship to another token preserves an iconic dimension. In language, *noun* is a class much like algebraic x , not because of shared physical characteristics but because it bears a lineal, distributional relationship to other categories, such as verbs, or adjectives. One noun may then be substituted for another as long as the syntactic relationship is maintained.

6. Assumption that the manipulation of arbitrary tokens is a necessary condition for language origin and evolution effectively blocks many fruitful avenues for exploring language origins. Recognition of the inevitability of successive degrees of iconic motivation in language evolution provides a basis for a logical scenario leading from miming to language. Non-arbitrariness, as an evolving iconic facility, beginning with physical mimicry and leading to language, has undoubtedly progressed through a succession of evolutionary stages, each building from the last at an ever-increasing rate. The Upper Paleolithic seems to have been the period during which the symbolically elaborated pieces came to be assimilated into a comprehensive cultural whole. The present degree of symbolic abstraction clearly indicates a long history of expanding exploitation of analogies.

A similar progression can be observed developmentally as small children expand their potential for symbolic, imaginative play, some of it solitary, some communicated through language to playmates. This

symbolic ability, dependent upon language for classificatory sophistication, led from its earliest manifestations to culture in all of its regional variation and local complexity. Human children use analogic (i.e., symbolic) play to internalize a particular culture. Increasing expertise in using language is a major tool to that end.

Since classification requires analogic ability, it follows that it could only develop in an evolutionary line in which a simple facility for representational analogy was already present, as in primate mimicry. While mimicry may seem a far cry from linguistic classification, it is clear that both are based on exploitation of recognized likenesses, the essential hallmark of language. An ability to manipulate arbitrary (hence basically meaningless) entities with no iconic grounding is essentially dependent only on the extent of an individual's ability for memorization. In contrast, the patterning of an iconically grounded classificatory structure expands memory capacity almost limitlessly and allows for imaginative variation. Assuming that such a classificational structure had much simpler beginnings, and recognizing the ability to exploit likeness exhibited in mimicry among primates, it follows logically that further analogical advances leading to language should have begun in the primate line rather than elsewhere. For this reason, study of the use of analogy in primate behavioral routines is a promising direction for research to take.

However, in existing studies of the potential of great apes for language, the role of analogy has been ignored. Reliance on Hockett's model, stressing the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, has been unfortunate. In most cases, arbitrary tokens have been presented as the representatives of words. Specificity has been emphasized rather than generalization. A severely limited model of language is presented to these subjects in an endlessly repetitious, hence mentally unstimulating, presentation of a token in exchange for a specific object. This technique represents language falsely as a system based on concrete naming, eliminating all of its classificatory richness.

In contrast, for language-learning children, language is presented as an imaginative game. While this is not lacking in opportunities to represent a token for a desired result, in interacting within this model children must exercise their analogic ability in the great guessing game leading to the discovery of the classificatory possibilities of a total language. That such discovery is possible in a very short time, with no more reinforcement than that of words and phrases recurring in differing environments and for different purposes, attests to an innate propensity for, and expectation of, classificational system in the activities of the human species.

While a simplified, language-modeled representation of one thing by another is the basis for ape instruction, the method resembles signalling more nearly than it does classificatory representation. In the wild, a signal call triggers expectation of an event. In ape training, presentation of a token similarly triggers expectation of the object or event specified by that signal. Efforts to teach syntax to apes increase the complexity of a signal by making the ordering of elements crucial to a successful outcome. It is clear that training can accomplish a certain proficiency in signal use. However, since nothing in the program is devised to test any expanded grasp of analogy, we are still in the dark as to ape potential for language.

Modern gestural language is less arbitrary than modern verbal language, although this is often denied in the interest of demonstrating that signing is a "true" language--arbitrary rather than iconic. Ironically, study of the iconic aspects of signing would throw much greater light on language evolution than its supposed lack of iconicity ever could. For the same reason, the Gardners' (1969) use of manual signing as a language model for apes made better sense than misguided efforts such as that of Premack (1971) to provide as arbitrary a linguistic method as possible. However, in none of these efforts has the classificational potential of apes been tapped, or recorded if it has spontaneously surfaced.

The teaching strategies devised for ape "language" instruction allow little room for investigation into the capability of apes to understand and use any but the most primary form of classification. They do

demonstrate that apes have a good memory for classes that have been assigned and consistently reinforced by their mentors, but not that apes themselves have the capacity to devise or grasp classificational *systems*. Other creatures than apes also learn to respond to words as signals for a class of objects. Consider, for example, a dog's correct response to such words as "ball" or "walk."

7. Unexamined acceptance of the long-perpetuated linguistic myth that the comparative method of language reconstruction is not capable of revealing the nature of prehistoric language at time depths beyond that achieved in reconstruction of Indo-European has greatly impeded progress in discovery of prehistoric language stages. This became a standard view after Kroeber (1960) called on comparativists to abandon efforts toward remote reconstruction on the basis that widespread diffusion had led to severe vocabulary erosion where long timespans were involved. This paper of Kroeber's was heavily influenced by Swadesh's (e.g., 1951) glottochronological investigations. Glottochronology seemed to support this view because of its emphasis on differential rates of vocabulary replacement of forms representing a list of one- or two-hundred meanings selected for their presumed lexical universality. What was not considered by Kroeber and his followers was that, while words may be replaced, it is rare that roots underlying words are completely lost. This is because most roots--particularly verb roots--almost invariably occur in more than one word, and often in many. Lost in some constructions they persist in others and can be recovered. While recovery of these proto-forms is more difficult than in cases of obvious relationship, they yield to persistent effort (Foster 1978; 1990a). At the earliest level, reconstructed roots are single sound units. The meanings of these are abstract rather than concrete. This is not dissimilar from the generalized meanings of verbs and prepositions expressing spatial relationships such as "falling," or "down." The difference is that the early tokens were not arbitrary. They were analogically motivated: oral mimicry of movements and spatial relationships were the rationale for these earliest representational utterances.

My serendipitous discovery of early analogical motivation, made during exploration of remote linguistic relationships, led me to a realization of the crucial role played by analogy in language origins (Foster 1990b). Steps toward establishment of an analogy-based developmental sequence leading to language as we know it has suggested a kind of inevitability in the evolutionary progression from a species of mime-proficient primates to a species of symbol-proficient hominids who were evolutionarily programmed to apprehend the world through the classifying lenses of their native culture.

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[back](#) < > [next](#)

April 8, 2000

Dear Suz,

I tried to organize my thinking in such a way as to pull together themes I have covered and those still remaining to be considered. It occurred to me that I had perhaps four major epiphanies in my life. The first forced me to come to grips with the problem of good and bad in life because of the insight, "Everything eats everything else." This led me to a philosophy that found merit and use for both happy and unhappy developments and made it easier to accept cancer. People keep praising my bravery. I don't think it is that, it is simply realization that bad is just as necessary as good and everyone has to have a share of it sooner or later. I am glad to have grown up thinking this.

The second awaited the discovery of anthropology as a way of analyzing life experiences comparatively as a legitimate discipline. It makes for tolerance and appreciation of social and individual differences.

The third was a result of the anthropological investigation of the grammar of a remote and unstudied group of people in Mexico. It was the realization of pattern and structure in cultural systems that are largely unconsciously enacted. Levi-Strauss also took the clue from the structuralism of linguistics, but expanded it into a general concept of structural anthropology and a detailed comparative and evolutionary analysis of mythology. Many anthropologists were unable to see the advantages of a structural approach detached from the specifics of L-S' analysis, which they found difficult to grasp. Similarly, Chomsky, hitting on a new way of analyzing language from the top down (text), instead of from the bottom up (phonology), condemned linguistic structuralism without noticing that his own method was equally structural. In making their own claims, scientists are often guilty of throwing out the baby with the bath water in this way.

Ideas have a way of coming back around if we wait long enough. Post-modernism seems to me an ultimate rejection of structuralism, and I hope and expect that it will be resuscitated, perhaps under a new name, if necessary in order to gratify the ego of the resuscitating agent.

To me it makes cultural (including linguistic) anthropology real sciences, with close attention to facts and their organization.

My next--probably ultimate--epiphany came with the discovery through global comparative analysis of language that the sounds of language were originally motivated by the analogy to other spatial relationships in nature of spatial movements of the oral tract in production of communicational sounds, giving them the potential for abstraction from the concreteness of the conditions obtaining at the time of their production.

Some of this may give you food for thought on questions, answers to which may make what I say less obscure than it would otherwise be. I hope it will expedite the concluding sessions a bit.

Yours for increased clarity,

Nature, Structure, and Human Society notes for oral history

Structure in nature: symmetry and asymmetry in plants and animals

Humans as structurers: Organization as structure, culture as organization
language as an example. Symbolism and structure: teaching and student input,
Symposia (AAA Mexico, Wenner Gren, Burg Wartenstein. Books: Symbol as
Sense, The Life of Symbols. Structure in ritual, music, poetry, art, daily activities
human problems with chaos (animals? dogs as example: dedication to routine).

Structuralism as the key to culture: linguistics, Levi-Strauss and mythology, earlier
acceptance and later general rejection in anthropology.

My relation to structuralism: Organization model for fieldwork in Mexico, linguistic
analysis, grammatical monographs, books and papers on symbolism,
comparative analysis of cultural rituals. Crucial to experiments in spatial and
composition in painting, photography, house external and internal planning,
gardening, living arrangements, in travel important to understanding foreign
ways of social and political organization, social harmony and disharmony, and
comparatively in search for underlying cultural universals.

Peace and Conflict: Relationships between anthropology and psychology. Current
affairs and how to address them individually and organizationally through PACT
(Pact offshoots: E. Ratcliff, Peace Garden) Commission on the Study of Peace,
arms Agreements (conflict escalation), differences in focus (AAA
Committee on Science, Arms Control and National Security, Ploughshares,
Ploughshares' board, IUAES Commission on the Study of Peace, books and
symposia with RAR.

Language Prehistory:

Structure and the Comparative Method. Exploration of borrowing and conviction
of monogenesis. Global application of the CM with attention to structure. Trial
and error in establishing primordial language (PL) phonology. Building on
successive successes. Glottosemantic Symposium in Paris. Language Origin
Society (biology, evolution, lack of linguistic interest and input. Research and
outmoding of articles. More articles and rewriting of book manuscript.
Oppositions, shifts in approaches (new books), hopes. Strengthening of belief in
importance of comparative study of cultural structure.

April 2001

INTERVIEWS ON THE HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Documenting the history of the University of California has been a responsibility of the Regional Oral History Office since the Office was established in 1954. Oral history memoirs with University-related persons are listed below. They have been underwritten by the UC Berkeley Foundation, the Chancellor's Office, University departments, or by extramural funding for special projects. The oral histories, both tapes and transcripts, are open to scholarly use in The Bancroft Library. Bound, indexed copies of the transcripts are available at cost to manuscript libraries.

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MULTI-INTERVIEWEE PROJECTS

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Architects landscape architects, gardeners, presidents of UC document the history of the UC presidential residence. Includes interviews with Mai Arbegast, Igor Blake, Ron and Myra Brocchini, Toichi Domoto, Eliot Evans, Tony Hail, Linda Haymaker, Charles Hitch, Flo Holmes, Clark and Kay Kerr, Gerry Scott, George and Helena Thacher, Walter Vodden, and Norma Willer.

Centennial History Project, 1954-1960. 329 pp.

Includes interviews with George P. Adams, Anson Stiles Blake, Walter C. Blasdale, Joel H. Hildebrand, Samuel J. Holmes, Alfred L. Kroeber, Ivan M. Linforth, George D. Louderback, Agnes Fay Morgan, and William Popper. (Bancroft Library use only.)

Thomas D. Church, Landscape Architect. Two volumes, 1978, 803 pp.

Volume I: Includes interviews with Theodore Bernardi, Lucy Butler, June Meehan Campbell, Louis De Monte, Walter Doty, Donn Emmons, Floyd Gerow, Harriet Henderson, Joseph Howland, Ruth Jaffe, Burton Litton, Germano Milano, Miriam Pierce, George Rockrise, Robert Royston, Geraldine Knight Scott, Roger Sturtevant, Francis Violich, and Harold Watkin.

Volume II: Includes interviews with Maggie Baylis, Elizabeth Roberts Church, Robert Glasner, Grace Hall, Lawrence Halprin, Proctor Mellquist, Everitt Miller, Harry Sanders, Lou Schenone, Jack Stafford, Goodwin Steinberg, and Jack Wagstaff.

Interviews with Dentists. (Dental History Project, University of California, San Francisco.) 1969, 1114 pp. Includes interviews with Dickson Bell, Reuben L. Blake, Willard C. Fleming, George A. Hughes, Leland D. Jones, George F. McGee, C. E. Rutledge, William B. Ryder, Jr., Herbert J. Samuels, Joseph Sciutto, William S. Smith, Harvey Stallard, George E. Steninger, and Abraham W. Ward. (Bancroft Library use only.)

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Includes interviews with Walter T. Steilberg, Robert Ratcliff, Evelyn Paine Ratcliff, Norman L. Jensen, John E. Wagstaff, George C. Hodges, Edward B. Hussey, and Warren Charles Perry.

Volume II: *Julia Morgan, Her Office, and a House.*

Includes interviews with Mary Grace Barron, Kirk O. Rowlands, Norma Willer, Quintilla Williams, Catherine Freeman Nimitz, Polly Lawrence McNaught, Hettie Belle Marcus, Bjarne Dahl, Bjarne Dahl, Jr., Morgan North, Dorothy Wormser Coblentz, and Flora d'Ille North.

The Prytaneans: An Oral History of the Prytanean Society and its Members. (Order from Prytanean Society.)

Volume I: 1901-1920, 1970, 307 pp.

Volume II: 1921-1930, 1977, 313 pp.

Volume III: 1931-1935, 1990, 343 pp.

Six Weeks in Spring, 1985: Managing Student Protest at UC Berkeley.

887 pp. Transcripts of sixteen interviews conducted during July-August 1985 documenting events on the UC Berkeley campus in April-May 1985 and administration response to student activities protesting university policy on investments in South Africa. Interviews with: Ira Michael Heyman, chancellor; Watson Laetsch, vice chancellor; Roderic Park, vice chancellor; Ronald Wright, vice chancellor; Richard Hafner, public affairs officer; John Cummins

and Michael R. Smith, chancellor's staff; Patrick Hayashi and B. Thomas Travers, undergraduate affairs; Mary Jacobs, Hal Reynolds, and Michelle Woods, student affairs; Derry Bowles, William Foley, Joseph Johnson, and Ellen Stetson, campus police. (Bancroft Library use only.)

Robert Gordon Sproul Oral History Project. Two volumes, 1986, 904 pp. Includes interviews with thirty-five persons who knew him well: Horace M. Albright, Stuart LeRoy Anderson, Katherine Connick Bradley, Franklin M. "Dyke" Brown, Ernest H. Burness, Natalie Cohen, Paul A. Dodd, May Dornin, Richard E. Erickson, Walter S. Frederick, David P. Gardner, Marion Sproul Goodin, Vernon L. Goodin, Louis H. Heilbron, Robert S. Johnson, Clark Kerr, Adrian A. Kragen, Mary Blumer Lawrence, Stanley E. McCaffrey, Dean McHenry, Donald H. McLaughlin, Kendric Morrish, Marion Morrish, William Penn Mott, Jr., Herman Phleger, John B. deC. M. Saunders, Carl W. Sharsmith, John A. Sproul, Robert Gordon Sproul, Jr., Wallace Sterling, Wakefield Taylor, Robert M. Underhill, Eleanor L. Van Horn, Garff B. Wilson, and Pete L. Yzaguirre.

The University of California during the Presidency of David P. Gardner, 1983-1992. (In process.) Interviews with members of the university community and state government officials.

The Women's Faculty Club of the University of California at Berkeley, 1919-1982. 1983, 312 pp. Includes interviews with Josephine Smith, Margaret Murdock, Agnes Robb, May Dornin, Josephine Miles, Gudveig Gordon-Britland, Elizabeth Scott, Marian Diamond, Mary Ann Johnson, Eleanor Van Horn, and Katherine Van Valer Williams.

UC BERKELEY BLACK ALUMNI ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INDEX--Mary LeCron Foster

- AAAS [American Association for the Advancement of Science],
 linguistics, 157-158; Committee
 on Science, Arms Control, and
 National Security, 166-167, 190
 AID [Agency for International
 Development], 169-171
 Algona, Iowa, 7, 9-10, 45, 74-75
 Anderson, Thor, 180
 Anderson, Barbara, 217
 Anderson, Marian, 56
 Anschluss, 1938, 118-120
 Anthropology Museum. See University
 of California.
 anti-Semitism, 22
 Appleby, Paul, 105
- Bateson, Gregory, 190
 Beeler, Madison, 155
 Benedict, Ruth, 110, 113
 Berkeley schools, 212
 Bernard, Bernice, 41, 63-64
 Blaisdell, Christine, 223
 Blaisdell, Thomas C., 169
 Bloomfield, Leonard, 181, 183
 Boas, Franz, 141-143, 150, 181-182
 Boulding, Elise, 190
 Bowerman, Eva, 198
 Brand, Donald, 138
 Brandes, Stanley, 137, 142, 165,
 224
 British social anthropology, 182
 Brown, Jerry, 105
 Burg Wartenstein, the castle, 221-
 225
- California State University,
 Hayward, 148, 158-159, 217-221
 Call, Asa [great-granduncle], 9
 Call, Ambrose [great-grandfather],
 7, 9-10
 Call family, sons, 78-79
 Carillo, Rafael, 123
 Caso, Alfonso, 135
- Center for Advanced Study in
 Behavioral Sciences, 218
 Chomsky, Noam, 143ff-149, 232
 Christian Science, 19, 93
 Claus, Peter, 222
 Columbia University, anthropology,
 111-113, 115-116
 Cousins, Norman, 167
 Covarrubias, Miguel and Rose, 136-
 137
 Cowles publications, 80
 Cowles Bertha [aunt], 5, 15, 47,
 74-75
 Cowles Flo [aunt], 17, 46
 Cowles Florence Call [grandmother],
 3-4, 7, 10-11, 13, 17-18, 47, 70
 Cowles Gardner [grandfather], 11-
 13, 17-18, 53
 Cowles John [uncle], 52-53; and
 Betty, 78; 91-92
 Cowles Mike [uncle], 52-53, 78-80
 Cowles Roscoe and Myrtle [grandaunt
 and granduncle], 79
 Cowles Russell [uncle], 15, 27, 52-
 53
 culture shock, 129, 164-165
 Cummings Art School, 112-113, 198
 Curtis, Helen [wife of Mike Cowles],
 78-80
- Dailey, Gardner, 207-208
 Darling, J. "Ding," 41
 Des Moines, Iowa, 1-3, 9, 25-26,
 36ff-44, 55-56, 90-93
 Des Moines Register and Tribune,
 12-13, 52-53, 115
 Dogie, Stanton, 51
- Eco, Umberto, 228
 Eisenhower, Milton, 106
 Emeneau, Murray, 155
- Fagen, George, 38-40
 Ferber, Edna, 22

- Flaherty, Eleanor [babysitter], 21, 58
- Flaherty, Mrs., and husband [laundress], 20-21, 37-38, 63, 67, 73
- Form and Formative in the Symbolic Process, symposium, Mexico City, 1974, 221
- Foster, Angela, 8, 211, 214
- Foster, George, 22, 53, 61-64, 68-69, 94, 102, 108ff-end
- Foster, Jeremy, 75-76, 121-123, 129-130, 197, 200, 205, 209ff-216
- Foster, Mary LeCron, on anagrams, 47-48; analogy, 171ff-176, 229-230; anthropologists and peace and war, 190-195; asking for things, 113; Austria in 1938, 102-103, 184; babies, 73-76; bedtimes, 94; birthday, 56-57; camping, 27-30, 58, 62, 71-72, 76-77; cancer, 161; childhood friends, 37-44; clubs, 55-56; competitiveness, 48; consciousness, 166, 174-175; creativity in education, 210; crying, 64, 68; culture, 161ff-166; death, 63-68, 71; Des Moines neighborhood, 36ff-44, 49-52, 55-60, 62; Des Moines schools, 30-33, 54-55, 90-92, 97; divorce, 78-80; dolls, 64-6, 113; exhibiting, labelling, 176-179; fieldwork, 121-129; France, French language, 98-104; gardens, 196-197; gossip, 206-207; household help, 88-90; humor, 210; illness, 62ff-73, 84-85, 100-101; intellectuals, 148-149; Jewish friends, 1938, 118-120, 194; July 4th, 59; languages, 125-136, 152-153, 171. See University of California Linguistics Department, other entries under language; living with an anthropologist, 138-139; marriage, 77-81; May Day, 57-58; memorizing, 8; menstruation, 76-77; Mexico City, 132, 135-139, 197; nature, nurture, 210; naughtiness, 23, 38;
- Foster, Mary LeCron (cont'd.)
nicknames, 28-29; organizing symposia, 221-225; painting, 198-199; parents' house, 93-94; peace and conflict, 166-169, 183-194, 232-233; pets, 66, 78; planning, 111-112, 117; pottery, 199-200; pregnancy and birth, 120-122; psychoanalysis, 69; pursuits in anthropology, 179ff-184; reading, 33-34, 45-46, 95-96, 195-196; religion, 17, 19, 22, 73, 92-93, 235-236; San Luis Road house, 39, 90, 197, 204-209; self-confidence, 54-55; shyness, 62, 71; teaching, 148, 158-159, 217-221; tourism, 163-164; traditions, 37; trivia, 44-47, 49, 158-159; Valentine's Day, 57; working with George, 133; World War I, 49-51; writing, 160-161
- Foster, Melissa. See Melissa Foster Van Schuur.
- Freudian psychology, analysis, 165-166
- Fromm, Erich, 148
- Gifford, Edward and Delila, 205
- global language reconstruction, 227
- Goodall, Jane, 176
- Greenaces School, Washington, D.C., 210-211
- Greenberg, Joseph, 212
- Grolier, Eric de, 226-227
- Haas, Mary, 141, 149-150, 155, 219
- Hart, Martha [mother's pseud.], 13-14
- Herskovits, Melville, 108-111, 139, 154-155
- Herzog, George, 125
- Hjelslev, Louis, 147-149
- Hobart, Alice Tisdale, 202
- Hoijer, Harry, 134, 136, 182
- Hurston, Zora Neale, 110
- Hutchison, Tom [cousin], 46
- Hymes, Dell, 156

India International Center, 170-171
 Ingham, Harvey, 12
 Institute of Social Anthropology,
 134, 181
 International Congress of
 Anthropological and Ethnological
 Sciences, Commission on the Study
 of Peace, 191-194
 International Peace Academy, 167-
 169, 185-189
 Iowa migrations, 6

Jacobson, Roman, 181
 Johnston, Joey, 23-24, 27, 37-43,
 49-50, 84, 112-113, 198
 Jurs, Albert, 204
 Jurs, Emily, 21, 81-82
 Jurs, Florence LeCron, 1, 14ff-34,
 39ff-60, 108, 113, 116, 138, 196,
 200-201
 Jurs, Gene, 70, 81-83, 113, 116,
 200-201
 Jurs, Julie Tanner, 109, 115, 168,
 185-186, 201, 204-205
 Jurs, Karen, 21, 76, 81-82
 Jurs, Pete, 200-201
 Jurs, Stephanie, 218

Kantor, MacKinley, 95
 Kent State Cambodia crisis, 218
 Kerr, Kay, 202
 Kroeber, Alfred, 110, 125, 130-132,
 141-143, 165
 Kroeber Hall. See University of
 California.
 Kroeber Theodora, 61, 64, 75, 81,
 142

Lange, Dorothea, 169-170
 language acquisition, 145-146
 language origins, 48-49, 160-162,
 171-176, 226-231
 Language Origins Society, 226-227
 Lawrence Livermore Laboratory, 188
 LeCron, Dan [uncle], 4

LeCron, Helen Cowles [mother], 4-7,
 9-10, 14-17, 19, 21, 24ff-34, 39,
 45ff-95, 102, 108, 112, 200-201,
 235-237
 LeCron, James DeFries [father], 1,
 3, 6, 8-9, 12-13, 16, 18-19, 22,
 25, 27, 29, 33-34, 38ff-47, 51,
 53, 55, 59, 63ff-73, 78, 80, 83,
 87, 91-98, 104-105, 108, 112ff-
 118, 196, 198, 200, 204, 235-236
 LeCron, Leslie [uncle], 3, 5-6, 47,
 51
 LeCron, Mary Frazer [grandmother],
 3, 7, 70
 LeCron, Simon [grandfather], 4, 12
 Leopold, Betty, 137, 202
 Leopold, Starker, 137
 Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 146-147, 149,
 160, 184
 linguistics. See University of
 California Linguistics
 Department, and entries under
 language.
 Lipscomb, Tura and John, 138
 Lovejoy, Helen, 29
 Lowie, Robert A., 110

Maccoby, Michael, 148
 Malinowski, Bronislaw, 109
 McMillan, Elsie, 167
 McPherson, Aimee Semple, 95-96
 Mead, Margaret, 106, 110-111, 163,
 190
 Metraux, Alfred, 110-111
 Metraux, Rhoda, 111
 Mitchell, Lucy Sprague, 202

New Deal, 104-105, 114
 Newman, Stanley, 134, 136, 138
 Northwestern University,
 anthropology, 107-110

Oberg, Kalervo, 164
 Obernberg, Austria, 222-223
 Otunnu Olara, 190

- PACT [Peace, A Community Task],
 168-169, 186-188
 Park, Willard Z., 108
 Pearson, Anita, 202
 Peirce, Charles Sanders, 162, 228
 Pepperberg, Irene, 172
 Pérez, Leandro, 125, 127-129, 180-181
 philology, 151
 Physicians for Social Responsibility, 188
 Pitkin, Harvey, 156
 Ploughshares, 187, 232-233
 Popoluca. See Sierra Popoluca.
 Proteus Club, 55-56
- Ratcliff, Elizabeth, 168
 Ratcliff, Robert, 207-209, 214
 Rawson, Tom, 38-40
 Rikhye, Indar J., 190
 Roosevelt, Eleanor, 106
 Rubinstein, Robert, 185ff-194, 232-233
- Sanskrit, 151-152, 173
 Sapir, Edward, 140-141, 143, 183
 Saussure, Ferdinand de, 181
 Sebeok, Thomas Albert, 228
 Seeger, Ruth, 215
 semiotics, 162
 Sewing Club, 200-201
 Sheets-Johnstone, Maxine, 162, 228-231
 Shimkin, Demetri, 110
 Shipley, William, 156
 Shore, Bertha. See Bertha Cowles.
 Shriners, 55
 Shultz, Gladys Denny, 94-95
 Sibley, Carol, 168
 Sierra Popoluca language, 123-136, 150, 153-154, 156, 179-180, 182
 Slobin, Dan, 48
 Society of Women Geographers, 55-56, 202
 Steward, Julian and Jane, 138
 Stipp, Joey Johnston. See Joey Johnston.
 Stirling, Matt and Marion, 138
- structuralism, 160-161, 181-183, 231-233
 Suckow, Ruth, 26
 Swadesh, Morris, 150
 symbolism, symbolic anthropology, 183, 219-222
 Syracuse University, 130
- Tarascan language, 127, 131, 135, 153-154; informant, 135
 Taylor, Paul, 169-170
 Thomas, Jan, 161
 Tillotsen, Eben, 123
 Timmony, George [Cowles' chauffeur], 19-21, 75
 Tonga language, 171
 Town and Gown Club, Berkeley, 32, 167, 200-202
 Transdisciplinary Symposium on Glossogenetics, UNESCO, 1981, 226
 Tzintzuntzan, 132-133, 153-154, 180
- Union of Concerned Scientists, 187
 United Nations, 168, 186
 University of California, Berkeley, Linguistics Department, 140ff-157
 University of California, Berkeley, anthropology, 116; Anthropology Museum, 176-179; Kroeber Hall, 177-178
 University of California, Section Club, 202-203
 University of California, Los Angeles, 130
- Van Schuur, Melissa Foster, 23-25, 48, 65, 72, 85, 97-98, 129-130, 197, 209ff-216, 223-225
 Vienna, Austria, 1938, 118-120
 Vogt, Nan, 222
- Wallace, Henry, 36, 96, 104-105, 114
 Weaver, Louise, 14-15
 Weitlaner, Roberto, 135

Wenner-Gren Foundation, Fundamentals
of Symbolism, symposium, 1977,
221-222, 224-225
Willkie, Wendell, 185

Young, Ruth Forbes, 168, 185-187

Suzanne Bassett Riess

Grew up in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. She received her B.A. in English from Goucher College in 1957. For several summers she was a feature writer for the *Bethlehem Globe-Times* of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. She did her graduate work in English literature at the University of London, and in art history at the University of California, Berkeley. She has been a senior editor in the Regional Oral History Office since 1960, interviewing in the fields of art and architecture, photography, social and cultural history, anthropology, writing, journalism, horticulture, physics, and University history. Her other interests have included many years of being a natural science docent at the Oakland Museum, that museum's Council on Architecture, free-lance photography, writing, gardening, and travel.



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